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FRISCO GUY'S BIG BONANZA.

BY ROGER STARBUCK.



THE BOY PROSPECTOR SPRUNG FORWARD, AND SEIZED THE UPLIFTED ARM OF THE INFURIATED GUIDE.

Frisco Guy's Big Bonanza;

OR,

THE BOY PROSPECTOR.

BY ROGER STARBUCK,
AUTHOR OF "OLD TAR KNUCKLES AND HIS BOY
CHUMS," "THE BOY CORAL FISHERS,"
"LUD LIONHEELS," "BLACK
HORSE BILL," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A TERRIBLE DEATH.

IN one of the gulches, among the mountains, near the upper part of the Sacramento Valley, California, a middle-aged man, dressed in the usual miner's suit of deerskin leggins, hunting-shirt and fishing-boots, was, tugging and straining, with might and main, to obtain gold.

Trees of oak and fir hid him from the gaze of the many other toilers, scattered throughout the valley at some distance from the position he occupied. Germans, French, Americans, and even Kanakas from the Sandwich Islands, were here, all eagerly intent on the same object. Some plied their spades among bushes and about the roots of trees, others used picks in the stone and gravel, a few had trowels to remove the glittering sand, and many, waist-deep in the water, were washing gold with common tin pans.

The tents and huts of these people, dotting hills and fields, extended for miles, but few of the habitations were so large and comfortable as the rather solitary hut of Henry Watson—the person who was toiling in the gulch, near his dwelling. He was the proprietor of the claim on which he labored, and he had men to help him work it.

Now, however, these men being out of his sight among the rugged elevations beyond him, he worked alone at the heavy boulder he was trying to remove. This boulder was supported on the edge of another rock by a quartz stem no thicker than a man's neck, and he hoped to find gold lumps imbedded therein when he should break through it.

"Good," he muttered, as he paused to rest, leaning on the crowbar he used. "I hope soon to strike this 'fellow's' yellow heart! Upon the whole, the claim has been a failure, but never mind; yonder, among the Sierras, I know a place, which will enable me to leave my boy a noble fortune, and—"

The huge boulder, which had been tottering, was toppling over. As Watson was about to spring away from it, he slipped and fell flat. Ere he could rise, the massive rock came down upon his back, breaking his spine and pinning him to the ground!

The wretched man groaned and struggled.

His eyes bulged from his head—blood flowed from his mouth and nostrils. He endeavored to call for assistance, but in vain.

Half an hour passed ere he was discovered.

From a thicket, not far off, another person then appeared.

He was a tall, powerful man, wearing a buckskin shirt and leggins, and a bearskin cap. Over his back was slung a rifle, a powder-horn dangled at his side, and in a broad belt about his waist were a knife and a pistol. His face was peculiar. He had a long, straight nose, massive jaws and a mouth about which there was a singular expression of blended cruelty, daring and good-nature. A heavy beard, of an auburn tint, almost concealed his visage, and from out of this mass of hair, his round, piercing gray eyes, with a livid scar between them, glittered like those of a panther.

This was Fiery Ned—so termed by hunters, trappers and miners on account of his quick, violent temper, which, backed by wonderful resolution and daring, often led him into desperate encounters, sometimes against fearful odds.

He was about thirty-five years old and Mr. Watson, who had long been a resident of San Francisco, had known him for years. He had selected him for his companion when he went to work his claim, Ned having agreed, for a certain consideration, to act at once as guide, guard, and hunter; to furnish their hut with provisions of game, with which the miner could thus be supplied at a much less cost than if he had purchased them of the sutlers in the locality or at Sacramento City.

The painful sight he now witnessed aroused all Ned's energies at once.

"Thunder!" he cried, "ef this aren't onfor-nit! Hilloa thar, Watson! Yer's not quite rubbed out, I hope?"

The lips of the sufferer moved, but no sound escaped them.

Ned had seized the crowbar and thrust it under the heavy boulder. This weighed about four hundred pounds, but so tremendous was the hunter's strength that he succeeded in raising it high enough for Watson to roll away from under it had there been sufficient life remaining in his half-crushed frame for him to do so.

Perceiving that there was not, the hunter lost no time in performing a feat of a truly perilous nature—in risking his own life to get the prostrate man away from his present position. Kneeling and resting the upper end of the crowbar, with the whole weight of the rock bearing upon it, on his right shoulder, he endeavored to draw the miner forward. The tremendous weight he bore made him tremble from head to foot. He strained every muscle, and the veins on his forehead and neck seemed ready to burst. One false move—one motion of the body either to the right or the left, would cause the crowbar to slip and bring the rock down upon him.

Slowly and carefully he drew his companion along, and was at last successful. Then, rising, holding the crowbar with both hands, he disengaged himself from his own uncomfortable posture.

A little brandy from a flask taken from his pocket revived the dying man so that he could speak a few words ere he breathed his last.

"Ned," he gasped, as his head rested on the

hunter's knee. "Bring him here—my boy—my son, Guy!"

"What fur! Tell me, and I'll do ennything fur ye that a mortil kin."

Slowly and painfully Mr. Watson pulled from his breast-pocket a thick piece of paper, which the other at once perceived was a map.

"First pay off my men. Then give this to my son. It is a nearly correct map of a gold section—a place where the sun never shines and upon which no mortal white man except myself has ever feasted his eyes. The rocks there are literally ribbed and veined with the rich metal, and the sands below shine with it like fireflies. I discovered it months ago, and I was going there in a few days had not this misfortune come. Put the map in my son's hands, and take him to the place. It will be hard work to find it—you may *never* reach it—there are so many difficulties in the way, but I have confidence in you, Ned, and know that you'll do your best both to protect and guide my boy."

"Ef I doesn't, may I be skinned fur a wild-cat! This coon aren't the pitifulest man livin'—thar's a fact—but sartintly, under sech circumstances as these, thar'd be room fur pity in a Crow nigger's stumick! But how did yer discover the mine?"

"I lost my way among the mountains—I got into a ravine, and there I found—the—the—Oh! God! I am going! I—"

His head fell backward—there was a momentary spasm—and the miner's spirit fled!

"Thar! he's gone under now!" soliloquized Ned. "This all comed of the greed fur gold! Thank fortin' I'm not quite so kantankerous arter the metal! It 'ud never content me to dig and grovel in the cussed sand and rocks, fur what mou'ntn't amount to much, arter all, when expenses war paid. Give me the rifle, with or without a good hoss, and I kin be saterfied with the free life of a rovin' hunter!"

He gazed mournfully down upon Watson, to whom he had really become attached, and then, looking at the broken stem of the dislodged rocks, he discovered that the miner had, after all, been mistaken about its value as it contained no gold.

And how about the other place of which he had spoken? Might not that also prove to contain nothing but dross?

Be this as it might, the hunter was determined to keep his promise. A young man from Oregon, with a wagon and a team of horses, was hired for the enormous sum of two hundred dollars, to carry the dead body of Watson, with his men and his effects to Sacramento City, two days' journey from the claim. There the remains were decently buried, after which, Ned having paid off the hired workmen of the miner, transported all the latter's property, by means of a second conveyance, to the son of the deceased, residing with his aunt at San Francisco.

He also gave the map to the boy, describing to him his parent's fate and his last wishes with regard to the secret gold section.

CHAPTER II.

THE FATAL BRIDGE.

GUY WATSON—the miner's son, was a fine-looking lad of fifteen. He was of florid complexion, broad in the shoulders, strong for his age and very active. Among his schoolmates he had won a reputation for courage and daring, and also for his skill in the manly exercises and sports to which boys are devoted.

Generous and high-principled, he had many friends. He was not at all conceited—was rather the reverse, with a singular prejudice, often noticed in youths of his age, against *his own good looks*.

Had it been possible to do so, he would gladly have exchanged his regular features, sparkling blue eyes, wavy chestnut hair and smooth, rosy cheeks, for the freckled, ungainly visage of the ugliest of his playmates!

The news of his father's sad fate affected him deeply. At this time he was at a boarding-school, and he now made all possible haste to accompany Fiery Ned on the expedition, in search of the secret gold mine.

As he had never learned to ride, the two resolved to perform the whole journey on foot. With a wallet slung over his shoulders, a good rifle, a brace of pistols and plenty of ammunition, he set out, one bright morning, with his guide. He wore, as best fitted for the task before him, a garb similar to that of his companion, except that his cap instead of being made of fur, was of light blue cloth, with a peak—something like that of an army officer.

Days passed before the travelers reached the Sierras. Then Guy unrolled his map.

"As you know, my father has marked a torrent here, Ned, as the first place to cross, after reaching the mountains," he said. "Where is that torrent? I see nothing of it."

"That's a fact," was the reply; "but ef yer listen, you kin heer it. Hark! thar she is, roarin' away like one of them 'farnal bullies from Arizona."

"I have known good men from those parts," remarked Guy.

"Have yer?" queried Ned, sullenly. "Well, I'd jest like to see one. I never yet see'd one, that I didn't feel like walkin' into his hash fur him! I hate the hull kit of 'em!"

"Why?"

"I'll tell you. Once on a time I tuck a likin' to a sartint gal, up that way. She was the smartest dancer, and the best housekeeper that ever waked up snakes. One of them Arizona bullies war my rival. He drawed his pistol on me, as they always does, but I cut him with my knife 'fore he could make her grunt. What does he do 'fore he drops, but slap his knife 'tween my eyes, leavin' the scar yer see. The gal, Suke, allers cottoned to this child, 'fore that, but, arter I got the scar, she allowed I war too grim-lookin' fur her, and went over to t'other coon."

"Of course you quietly made tracks, after that?"

"Did I? I swore I'd hev his blood!"

"Wrong, there," averred Guy. "As she preferred him, you should have left them alone."

"It aren't my way," returned Ned, fiercely.

"The chap war a half-breed, anyhow—not worth shucks. Two day sarter marryin' the gal, he left her—slunk off somewhar, and I've never been able to find him, since."

"Glad of it!" said Guy.

"What?" cried Ned, angrily. "You side with that cursed varmint?"

"No, but it prevented bloodshed—that's what I mean."

"See hyar, boy," expostulated Ned, "don't yer go fur to be too soft-hearted! It won't do in this bizness. We may hev some skrimmages 'fore we git through."

"I expect that, and will do my part, when necessary," answered Guy, tapping his rifle. "I am not a bad shot!"

The hunter looked long and earnestly at the lad, his fierce piercing gray eyes, meeting the calm, steady gaze of the boy's blue orbs.

"You'll do," he said, at last, bringing the butt of his piece to the ground, with a thump.

"Yes, lad, I think you'll do, well enough! Only I hev this advice to give yer: Never spar an Injun enemy when you've got yer knife at his gizzard; yer kin show no mercy to sech critters!"

The two now began to ascend the precipice before them. At last, climbing over a crag, they saw the torrent just beyond.

It was about ten feet broad, rushing madly along down a sharp declivity till it disappeared in a dark gorge hundreds of feet in depth.

"How are we to cross it?" queried Guy.

"My father has stated, on the map, that there's a bridge over it, made of a couple of large fir trees."

"That war months ago. Thar's all the bridge we kin hev, now," said Ned, pointing to a slender birch, fastened on each end in the fissure of a rock. Some thievin' Injuns hev taken away t'other trees—I kin almost sw'ar to that!"

"Will that birch bear our weight?"

"Sartint; but yer'll hev to hold on hard. Yer a good clomber, I 'pose?"

"Rather," observed Guy, his eyes sparkling with a consciousness of his skill in that respect. "I can cross that pole."

"Easy, thar, easy! I'll go first, and then yer kin see what yer'll hev to do."

Guy noticed that before starting Ned slung his rifle, etc., round in front of him, shifting the straps so that the things lay over his shoulder.

A moment later, on his hands and knees, he started along the slender trunk. It swung from side to side, requiring a firm balance for any one to keep his place on it. Meanwhile it bent more and more as the hunter approached the middle of it. There it curved downward so much that Ned was immersed in the swift, rushing torrent almost to his hips.

Strong as he was, he found it very hard to hold his place—to keep himself from being swept off; but he crossed at last.

Shifting his rifle, wallet, and powder-horn, Guy was soon on the frail trunk. All went well until he reached the middle. His weight was not sufficient to cause him to dip into the water so much as his companion had done, but he

went far enough to feel the almost irresistible force of the rushing torrent. He held firmly, and endeavored to keep on. He had reached the worst place, when the sweeping mass of waters tore his legs from the pole in spite of all his efforts.

He held on with his hands to the remains of a couple of strong stems. The water tugged at him like a giant, but he still held on, winding the stems about his wrist to make his grasp more sure.

Ned was moving along to his assistance. He was within a few feet of him, when Guy heard an ominous cracking, and the hunter rapidly retreated backward toward the rocky shore he had left.

"It is all up with me!" thought Guy. "The trunk is about to give way! Nothing can then save me from being swept down into the gorge!"

By this time Ned had reached the shore. As he stood upright the birch trunk parted! Swift as an arrow the lad was being borne along toward the death-gorge, when he beheld something whirling before his eyes, and the next moment his course was arrested almost on the brink of the frightful precipice by a rope, which he could feel pressing against his back and ribs.

Ned had saved him by making a lasso of the rope he carried and hurling it so that it caught under his arms. The other end he had immediately secured to a spur of rock, and now, hauling upon the rope, he soon had the boy safe at his side.

Guy thanked him warmly.

"Pack that, boy! Of course it war nateral fur me to save you, and you may be called upon yit to do me some sech turn. That trunk *had no bizness to part*," he added, as he surveyed it, for he had hauled in the half of the tree remaining on that side of the torrent, so tightly jammed in the rocky crevice that it had not been carried off.

"What do you mean, Ned?"

"Thar. I knowed thar'd been foul play," and the hunter pointed to the broken end, a part of which was quite smooth. "Some varmint hev been at this trunk with a *knife*, an almighty mean trick; some cussed Injun's work, I'll allow, to git us into the torrent an' put an eend to our s'arch."

"How do you know it was done for our benefit?" inquired Guy.

"I aren't shore, of course, but I kin almost sw'ar it war done fur that."

"But we have kept our secret. I have not breathed a word about it to a living soul."

"Nor I, but it are hard to keep anything from an Injun."

The two walked on until they reached a flat rock near a cave. Here Ned said they would stay for the present. Some branches were found near the place, and a fire being kindled, the travelers dried their wet garments. Soon after Ned saw an elk, which he shot, and a good meal was prepared, of which Guy and his companion partook with keen appetite.

CHAPTER III.

THE VISION OF THE CRATER.

NEXT morning after breakfast the two were again on the move.

Guy had unrolled the map, to discover that the next difficulty they had to encounter was a lofty peak containing an extinct crater.

"I know the place," announced Ned. "It would take two days to clomb over those jagged crags around that farnal fire-hole. But thar's a shorter cut by gittin' down into the crater itself. I was oncet thar, and I know of a passage in the hole, ef I kin find it ag'in, which 'll take us through the very stumick of the mountain, out on t'other side."

They traveled for hours, climbing over rocks, threading narrow defiles, descending into hollows, or toiling through dark gloomy forests of cedar and pine. Ned, who had often traversed these places, led the way with a celerity and activity which excited Guy's admiration.

"Thar she is!" cried Ned, at last as they reached the base of a lofty peak.

Far upward it towered—far above the branches of the loftiest trees, until its summit was lost in the clouds.

As huge steep crags projected from every side except the one the travelers confronted, they must ascend it here in order to pass it. Stupendous masses rose on the right and left, and Ned said it was the same way on the other side. By descending into the crater, he hoped as he had stated, to find the passage, through the heart of the mountain, into a narrow defile, which would enable the two to gain, without much difficulty, the outside of the rugged cliffs, beyond.

They commenced the ascent, and finally reached the summit of the peak, and the crater was before them. It was about the eighth of a mile in circumference, and peering into it Guy perceived that the walls were cracked and blackened. He could not see the bottom of this deep gulf, but, far below him, he fancied he beheld for an instant, an object moving down one of its sides, until it was lost in shadow.

"Now, then, boy, yer kin take yer choice either to go into the hole or over them crags, in front. Ef we clomb down thar, we save a mortil big distance, but yer'll hev to keep a shore foot and band, as the walls, although havin' plenty of protrudin's to git hold on area't 'zactly like a st'ar-case."

"We'll go down if you like, but what was that I saw descending the wall, a moment since?" demanded the boy.

"Ef yer see'd anythin', it was probable nothin' but a loosened rock or clump of snow a-slidin' down."

They commenced the descent, Ned taking the lead. The walls were cracked and blistered, and several times Guy's foot came near being caught in some crevice.

At last they reached the top of a long, steep declivity.

Ned pulled from his belt a small pine stick having a knot on the end, and lighted it. The torch throwing a lurid glare about the twain, revealed an opening in the side of the crater-wall.

"Hyar we are, boy, come on," said the hunter.

He led the way into a passage about seven feet broad having a floor of hardened lava crust, and which described a gradual descent. As they proceeded, Guy noticed that there were other openings in the walls, on each side of the passage.

Above it, the roof was so seamed with cracks, and covered with bulging fragments, that the latter looked as if they might fall at any moment.

Just as they gained the middle of the passage there was a flash of light, followed by a noise like a thunder-clap, and an enormous rock came crashing down from the roof, directly in front of them, barring their progress! At the same moment a peculiar smell pervaded the atmosphere.

"Sulphur!" cried Guy. "It has exploded somewhere near, and—"

"No, no, boy," interrupted Ned, "it are best to call things by the'r right names. It's gunpowder you smell. Wait till I come back! You'll soon heer music, ef I aren't mistook. Thar's an Injun somewhar about, and ef he didn't fire off his piece a-purpose to make that rock come down, yer kin call me a dod-rotted fool!"

So saying, Ned darted into the opening on his right. Guy, now in darkness, waited long for his return. When he advanced a little into the opening, and shouted the hunter's name.

There was no reply.

He advanced still further. Finally he entered a cave of a sort of circular shape. He took from his pocket a small taper he had brought with him, and lighted it, for he had a supply of matches.

Some singular outlines, which he had seen looming through the gloom, were now distinctly revealed to his gaze.

To his surprise he beheld, still upright before him, the skeleton of a horse, upon which was also seated that of a tall human being, dressed in leggins with trimmings, with a belt about the waist, a bow and a quiver of arrows over the shoulders!

At first Guy was somewhat startled, but he quickly remembered that the Indians had a custom of entombing distinguished warriors in this manner.

He was evidently in one of these sacred burial-places, which had been long occupied by the dead. The spear, tomabawk, and hunting-knife of the deceased were on a shelf of the rock against which his back was propped, and the horse was kept in its position by strong thongs, tied to other fragments of rock. Not a particle of flesh remained on its occupant. The leggins, with their gaudy fringes, hung loosely, and the deerskin mantle, depending from one shoulder, revealed the gaunt ribs beneath which the hunting-belt had caved far inward.

As the boy gazed, a little awe-stricken at the strange spectacle, his surprise and horror may be imagined when he saw one of the arms of the ghastly figure slowly rise and move to and fro, as if motioning him away—warning him to go back! A cry of dismay escaped him, and he

was about to leave the place, when it suddenly occurred to him that perhaps Ned had concealed himself behind the skeleton, and was thus testing his courage.

This surmise, however, was quickly dissipated by the voice of the hunter behind him.

"Thunder! By all the mortils of airth! What kin that mean?"

As he spoke, Ned bounded forward and looked behind the horse, but no person was there. Meanwhile the skeleton arm, half-draped by the deerskin mantle, continued its warning movement.

The hunter, who was not at all superstitious, got upon a boulder and thrust the mantle to one side. He saw nothing to account for the mystery, but the arm now hung motionless.

"It beats all nater! though I'm sartint it's some 'farnal trick to keep us back," he said, returning to Guy. "Come, boy, we'll jest go on and leave the cussed place."

"But our passage is blocked by the rock that fell."

"Yes, on account of the varmint that fired his gun, and who I couldn't find. Now ther's no choice. This yere mountain are as full of holes as a wasp's nest, and we'll hev to take a longer and harder route."

As he spoke he led the way into a smaller passage, where at times the two were obliged to crawl upon hands and knees.

At last a light was seen ahead, and they emerged at the base of one of the crags, fronting the volcanic peak.

"We'll have to clomb this to git to the defile, which are about twenty feet above us," said Ned. "It'll be a hard clomb and a dang'rous one, which that devil, whoever he war, that balked us, knowed well enough. I dar' say he is watchin' us now, and fondly hopin' we'll break our necks."

"If he can see us now, I should think he might put an end to future trouble by shooting us."

"No, no, boy; that aren't policy! The skunk knows that I hev many friends, and ef they had reason to think I'd been foully rubbed out, thar'd be no rest fur the Injuns 'bout heer—yer kin be shor'."

The two with difficulty ascended the crag.

It took them many hours to gain the bottom of this hight, to scale another in front of it and to pass the gorges and ravines beyond. On the way they saw many black-tailed deer, scampering off and leaping from crag to crag.

All at once Ned darted off and descended into a deep, rocky hollow, whence the report of his rifle soon rung. Guy saw him a moment later, come staggering out with a small deer, minus the head and hoofs, slung over his shoulder.

As it was now nearly night, the hunter halted by a rocky hollow, and Guy having gathered sticks, he soon had some slices cut from his prize frying over a fire in the small pan, which formed one of the contents of his wallet.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MOUNTAIN BEAUTY.

AFTER a good night's rest and an excellent breakfast, the two, next morning, proceeded on their journey.

The sun shone brightly, and the thickets through which the travelers passed were here and there penetrated by shafts of golden light. Far in the distance, on the summit of a lofty peak, glittering in the rays of the sun, was a rock, covered with snow and ice, in the form of across. This rocky cross was the next landmark traced upon the map.

When, at last, they gained the foot of the mountain, which, half-way to the summit, was clothed with gigantic firs and cedars, they discovered that the sides were furrowed with deep gorges and ravines. Ned commenced the ascent along the ledge, which narrowed as the two proceeded.

Finally they were obliged to creep along on hands and knees, the hunter taking the lead. At this point the ledge formed the top of a wall, several hundred feet in hight, that rose from the very heart of a dark, gloomy ravine. On both sides of the travelers, therefore, the ravine opened its black mouth, which would have proved to be a veritable death-hole had they slipped off, as they would then have been dashed to pieces upon the rocks, far below.

"Hold on hard, boy," warned Ned. "Ef yer feel dizzy, tell me. It are a shaky route!"

"I am not dizzy," answered the fearless lad. "I'll 'follow master' wherever you lead."

Here and there on the ledge were clumps of moss and earth, in which a few scraggy bushes had taken root. Just beyond one of these clumps, Guy finally beheld what appeared to be a bank of black moss. The upward inclination of the ledge enabled him to see it over Ned's shoulder.

"Black moss," said Guy, surprised—"that's a curiosity I—"

"Hist! it aren't moss, at all! I wish it war, under present sarcumstances. Do as I'm doin', boy!"

The hunter had paused, straddled the ledge, and unslung his rifle from his back.

Cocking it, he pointed it at the bank-like object ahead.

"Don't fire, till arter I do," he ordered. "Then aim steady, over my right shoulder. What yer tuck fur moss are a black b'ar, with his back to us and his nose down ag'in the rock."

Bang! went the piece as he spoke. The bear, which occupied a sort of rocky platform, where the wall broadened, now turned, and, with a deep, savage growl of rage, came toward the hunter, who was reloading.

"Steady! Aim fur the critter's head!" cried Ned, as Guy pointed his rifle across his shoulder.

The boy blazed away. The bear received his shot slantingly on the head. It enraged him all the more, and his eyes flashed with fury as he came on.

He was within four feet of Ned, ere his rifle was again ready.

The hunter pointed his weapon and fired. The

monster reeled, but did not fall off the ledge, although there were now two shots in his body.

It came limping on, and when close to Ned, rose to strike him with one of its huge paws. Had it done so, he would have been knocked from the narrow wall, but, holding his long hunting-knife in his right hand, he drove it into the creature's shaggy breast, at the same time butting it with his head in the stomach, with a force like that of a battering-ram!

The knife-blow and the shock of the head were effective. The bear was sent over from the ledge, into the dark depths of the ravine!

"Hoo! thar he goes!" said Ned. "It war the best way to deal with the varmint in sech narrer quarters."

"Golly!" cried Guy. "You must have a head like iron!"

"My head, I hopes, are the hardest part of me," answered the hunter, "though I don't know as my heart's much softer. I used to hev buttin'-matches, in my young days, with niggers, and I most allers comed out best."

The obstruction to their course having been removed, they kept on their way, to finally reach the summit of the mountain. It was covered with ice and snow, and the cross-shaped rock they had previously observed, and which, at a distance, had seemed to be so small, rose before them nearly to the height of a hundred feet. Some distance below them a thick mist lay like a cloud.

They commenced to descend, and having passed through the cloud, they emerged upon a rock, which revealed far below, a scene of wild and surpassing beauty. Hundreds of yards beneath them, was a small lake, the waters of which, falling over a mass of rocks, descended about seventy feet into another lake. Rising from this lake, opposite to the elevation they occupied, was a mass of earth and rock, glowing with flowers and vegetation. Spreading oaks, cedars and firs grew on its summit, and a broad rock, shelving outward from under one of these trees, overhung the lake. To right and left of this paradisiacal hill, which gleamed like an oasis, imbedded among the sterner mountains of the Sierras, rose bold rugged masses, peak upon peak, to the very clouds, with here and there a torrent, stream or cataract visible among its clefts and ravines.

A cry of admiration escaped Guy.

"Yes, boy, hyar we are, at the valley and lake marked on the map. We haven't more'n five mile more to go to find the place we are arter."

They descended into the valley, reaching the rock overhanging the lake, at about noon. Ned left Guy waiting for him under the shade of a spreading white oak, while he went to shoot some of the California quail, which were flying into a thicket of firs, not far off.

The boy stood gazing down at the lake, when, all at once, from a little cove, he saw a small bark canoe drifting out on the waters. In this canoe an Indian girl, apparently not more than fourteen years old, lay reclined and fast asleep. She wore a robe of deerskin, reaching to the knee, confined about the round, supple waist with a bright, red belt, having a gold buckle and containing a silver-mounted pistol. Her shoulders

over which were slung an ornamented bow and a quiver of arrows, were bare and beautifully formed, with her long, black, shining hair streaming over them from under a small round hat of doeskin, decorated with the feather of some bright-winged bird. A small gold button, shaped like a star, confined the feather to the front of the hat, and catching the beams of the sun, harmonized with the beauty of the sleeper. She was a lovely creature, and Guy stood looking down upon the sweet, finely-molded face like one entranced.

She had evidently been gathering flowers, as a large bouquet, composed of the wild narcissus, the tulip, the mountain verbena and the lilac, with a few green, oval-shaped leaves interspersed, lay so close to her face that it seemed to nestle lovingly in the smiling curves of the pretty mouth.

All at once the boy started. To his dismay he perceived that the frail bark was nearing a small inland, on the shore of which stood a wild cougar or panther, glaring at the slumberer and evidently waiting until the craft should come near enough for him to spring upon her and make her his prey!

Guy's heart beat fast. He must save the girl, if possible.

He cocked his piece, took careful aim at the panther and fired!

But the savage beast stood unharmed.

"She will be lost!" thought the boy, dismayed to perceive that the report of his piece had not awakened the girl!

Without a moment's hesitation, he laid down his rifle, threw off his shoes, and plunged from the rock into the lake below.

He was a good swimmer, and he struck out with might and main.

But the canoe was so near the isle that he feared he would be too late. He strained every nerve, however, and, getting into a place where the current was the strongest, he gained the little bark, just as the panther was about gathering itself for a spring.

In an instant he was in the canoe, paddle in hand, backing away from the isle, where, with a baffled growl of rage, the savage beast now retreated, among some bushes, near the bank.

The splashing of the paddle unskillfully applied, soon awoke the sleeper. She sprang to her feet with a cry of surprise, and the boy, as he turned, met the flash of a pair of soft brilliant black eyes.

CHAPTER V.

SAVAGE VISITORS.

THERE was something so bright and intelligent in this beautiful girl's face, so different from the swarthy skin, high cheek-bones and thick lips of the Indian squaws whom he had occasionally seen, that Guy evinced as much surprise as his companion.

"Boy, what do you here?" she inquired in a rich voice, singularly blending the tones of the woman and the child. "Answer me, I say!" she added, stamping one of her little feet.

He quickly explained how he had rescued her. Then her eyes softened, and as she met his admiring gaze, a bright blush deepened the color of her olive cheek.

"Boy, you saved my life, I thank you!" she said, holding out one little hand.

The touch of those fingers was very pleasant.

"I would save it over and over again a thousand times," he averred.

"Why?" she asked, simply. "Aiden is a stranger to you—you to her."

"Because you are beautiful," answered Guy, honestly.

She smiled and looked pleased.

"I like your *speech*," she said. "You are my friend. How came you here?"

Guy hesitated. The search for the gold mine was a secret.

"Oh, well, keep back the word, then," she added, noticing his confusion. Then she clapped her hands and smiled. "You show reason; you look now at my gold button," and she laid a finger on the glittering star that confined her feather. "It is well. I see! You *come for gold*."

A sadness fell upon her face.

"Go back, boy; go back you must," she continued, after a moment's silence.

"You want me to go back?" and Guy looked a little piqued.

"It is for sake of your life. No gold-hunter Indians want here. I would not see arrow *there*," she rejoined, pointing toward his heart.

"Perhaps there is one there already!" he answered, laughing. "Since I saw you—I mean."

At first she looked puzzled. Then the long, silky lashes veiled her black eyes. Evidently she understood him, but would not acknowledge it.

"No," he declared. "I will not go back. I have a companion, and he and I know there is a rich valley of gold somewhere not far from here. We must find it."

"So you will make the find, then?" she asked seriously. "Look out; danger will come!"

"My companion is a perfect dare-devil. He fears no danger."

Aiden glanced around her. Then she took her paddle from the boy and directed the canoe back toward the cove.

As the light bark was passing a clump of bushes, within a few feet of her destination, a hand was thrust forth, grasping the bow and drawing the canoe to the shore.

A man rose to view and, seizing the warp, held on to it. The fellow was a half-breed, of dark, scowling visage, wearing a semi-civilized dress. His leggings were of buckskin, his breast and shoulders were bare, a beaver hat, with a feather, was upon his head. Protruding from a broad belt about his waist was a long knife, and he held a rifle in one hand. His age was about thirty.

"Ho! why does Aiden make friends with the white boy?" he inquired.

"No business yours," she replied, with a flash in her black eyes. "Let go the canoe rope."

"I will not let go. Am I not the friend of Aiden's father, the chief? Have I not served him faithfully?"

"Aiden wants not your serve!" she replied. "Again, I say, let the rope go."

The half-breed still held on. Guy then seized the rope, and with a quick jerk pulled it from his grasp.

The man's scowling visage ~~was~~ turned fairly to turn black with rage.

He raised his rifle as if to shoot the youth, but brought it down again, apparently arrested by an after-thought.

The canoe glided on.

"You have enemy now," remarked Aiden. "Satole is bad man. His *hands* are red."

"I am not afraid of him," said Guy, carelessly.

"Snake not worse than Satole," continued Aiden. "He is light as a shadow on the trail! He can be so close that he might touch you and you not have the *know* of his being there. I think he, with one of the sons of our chief, has been following you and your friend. He knows you look for gold."

"Again I say I have no fear of him, and now here's the cove, right ahead."

Aiden directed the canoe into it.

"Go, boy," she said, holding out her hand. "We are friends, but I give you the good-by."

"Shall I not see you again?" inquired Guy.

"Yes."

"Where?"

"I cannot give you the where. We will meet. Aiden has said it."

She shoved away her canoe, and paddled briskly across the lake.

Guy soon lost sight of her in a small bay thickly fringed with shrubbery. He returned to the flat rock, where he saw Ned quietly seated by a fire, roasting a couple of California quail which he had shot.

"You've been long away, but it's nateral, I reckon, to one of your years," said Ned. "I kin remember the time when I couldn't see a pooty face 'thout wantin' to git *mine* as clus to it as blazes."

Guy colored deeply, and was a little confused.

"So you saw me?" he said.

"Yes, both on yer. I heerd your rifle, and went to see what war up. When I comed in sight o' the lake, I see'd yer in the canoe, with the Injun gal."

Guy now explained how it happened, and also told Ned about his meeting with Satole.

At the mention of that name, the hunter's eyes literally blazed.

"Why, by the Lord! that are the cussed skunk I told yer 'bout, who did me out of Suke! A tall, lean chap, warn't he, with a sort o' squint in his eye? Drat me, ef I don't think them kind o' squints takes with the wimmen!"

"You are right in your description. He was tall, lean and squinty."

"Hooh! So the feller's j'ined the Injuns! Ef I ever comes across him, good-by to his 'taters! Tell yer what, boy, I b'lieve he's been trackin' us, and that he war the one that made the rock fall, and arterwards set that skeleton's arm a-goin'."

The quails were soon done to a turn, and the two travelers made a good meal.

As soon as Ned had smoked his pipe, and thus soothed his excited feelings, caused by the mention of Satole, he rose and again led the way on the journey. It was nearly sundown ere they reached the next place marked on the map—a bright, green valley, through which ran a narrow stream.

On the borders of this stream they halted for the day.

As they were partaking of their supper, consisting of venison and corn-meal cakes—the latter of which Ned had baked before a fire, on a flat stone, they suddenly heard a rustling in the brushwood, near, and the next moment the crack of a rifle rung sharply on the air, followed by the whiz of a bullet, which passed through the top of Ned's hat, just grazing his skull!

In fact, had it not chanced that he stooped just as the piece was fired, the deadly missile would have entered the back of his head.

Without showing the least excitement, the trained hunter sprung up, cocking his rifle and standing on his guard motioning at the same time to Guy to imitate his example.

In their present position the two were partly screened by a rocky ledge, a few feet from their fire.

Two Indians—stout, and swarthy and nearly naked, armed with bows and arrows, came forth from the brush, and before Ned could fire, one of them held up a hand, as a signal that he came with pacific intentions.

Guy gazed with some curiosity at these people. They were of short stature but powerfully built, and had broad faces, with flat noses, wide mouths, coarse black hair and small, gleaming eyes. With the exception of a fringed piece of buckskin about the middle, they were entirely naked, and their enormous moccasined feet, hardened by travel over the rocks, were shaped like horses' hoofs.

Their arms were bows and arrows, the former being rather short and lined with raw-hide.

"Waal, niggers, yerv'e brass enough comin' hyar, in this way, arter that shot!" cried Ned. "Speak quick! or I'll plump a bullet in yer stumicks!"

"Ugh! pale-face too quick get mad! Why should he call us names?" said one of the Indians.

"Good gracious! yer kin ask that, arter makin' a target of this child's head?"

"Injun no fire! Half-breed Satole fire! We tell not, but he fire before we can stop! Good! that is so!"

"It's anything but good, though I'll allow what yer say, mout be true 'bout that 'farnal half-breed. Whar is he, ef you please? Jest bring him hyar, won't ye?"

And Ned's eyes flashed fire as he spoke.

"Satole have long beel! When he see me mad, he run off! Now tell why come. White men look for gold?"

"That's our own affair," said Ned.

"Ugh! we know look for gold, but no gold in mountains. Better go 'way."

"Thar is gold," said Ned—"we are pooty shore of it. A good prospector has said so, and we know jest whar to look fur it."

"The sand shines—the rocks look brown, but this is not gold! No, it is only mica! You will find it so."

"At any rate we'll go and see fur ourselves."

"The way is long and hard. Much work you save if no go further! Better go back. It is good!"

"No," answered Ned, doggedly. "I'll keep on ef I find nothin' but sawdust."

"Be it so, then, but the pale-face will see that it is true. I have said it, and I go!"

Without another word the two Indians stalked away.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MEETING.

THAT night Ned kept a good watch, not only against treachery from Satole, but also from the Indians. In spite of their assumption of indifference when they went away, he had seen that they were deeply offended.

"Do you believe them about there being no gold in the place my father marked out?"

"No."

"You remember you said it might prove to be only dross."

"I don't think so, now. I feel shore thar is gold, ef we kin only find the place. Them Injun niggers is mortil liars, and the very fact of the'r sayin' ther' warn't no gold, are proof to me thar is!"

Next morning they kept on.

Mile after mile did they traverse, through valleys, thickets, ravines, and over steep crags; but they looked in vain for that particular ravine marked on the map. In many places they beheld the white-veined quartz rocks, and here and there the red clay, which is always met with in gold sections, and in which species of rock and earth the precious metal is usually seen, but the glittering ravine mentioned by Guy's father could not be found.

The day passed in a fruitless search. When night came the two travelers paused in a thickly-wooded hollow, and there making a fire, had supper.

"By the power of airth!" cried Ned, clinching his teeth and his fists at the same time, "I sartintly wish I could find that Satole! Even ef we don't strike yer father's gold-place, I shall come back hyar arter I guide you to Sacramento!"

"Pshaw, Ned, what's the use of indulging such feelings?" expostulated Guy. "I don't believe in holding a grudge!"

"Waal, then, I do!" cried Ned, fiercely. "I'll cut the feller's heart out yet, ef I hev to wade through a cataract of blood to git at it!"

Guy could not help shuddering as he gazed upon the scarred, fiery face of the hunter, lighted by the lurid gleam of the brushwood flames.

The fire was getting low, so Guy went off a short distance to gather some sticks for replenishing it.

He had gained the edge of the thicket, where he was hidden from Ned's gaze, when, all at once, he heard a light rustling among some oak leaves with which the ground was strewn from a recent high wind.

Turning quickly, he gave a joyful cry on seeing the beautiful being of whom, to tell the truth, he had lately thought much more than of his father's mine.

There she stood, the rays of the full moon falling upon her gold belt-clasp and upon the shining button of the same material holding her feather. Her attitude, her fanciful dress, the lightness of her little feet, whose embroidered moccasins seemed scarcely to touch the ground, gave something fairy-like to her appearance.

At Guy's cry she put a finger on her rosy lip, while her large, black eyes shone up at him from under her arched brows.

"Yes, I am here for another speak," she said, "for I promised to come."

"I am so glad to see you again," confessed Guy, as he took her hand.

She did not withdraw it until he began to press it too warmly, then she gently pulled it away.

"You are good boy, but you have the bad, too," she said, quietly.

"Did I hurt you?"

"The big brother bird does not hurt the chick sister when he lifts her to teach how she make the flying, but she not *always* likes it."

"Then I may press your hand once in a while?"

"Not too long."

"May I kiss you?"

"There is not need. We are not long acquainted."

The boy advanced; she lightly stepped back.

"No, I am proper girl," she said, holding up one hand. "Look out you! I not will have *many* happiness if you have persisting. I go away, very sad, about that, and I never come see you more!"

While the bell-like music of her voice enchanted him, he could perceive that she was in earnest, and he paused.

Instantly, with great gravity, she changed the subject, trying to assume a look of owl's wisdom, and to deepen her voice, which thus partook of the sound of an organ.

"For *business* speak, I come here. It is for gold you and your friend make the long walk. Well, my father not likes it—none of Indians like it. I want you go away soon as can, so you not get the hurt. Come, I will show you the way as well as I can, to place you look for; then you may find it quick, and more quick take back trail. After you will again come with more men with guns. Then the danger will be over. Come!"

She glided along, and he followed.

But as they were passing a rock, an Indian youth, of about his own age, emerged from behind it. He was a tall, well-formed boy, better dressed than the other Indians Guy had seen. He wore deerskin leggings, a hunting-shirt and a red Mexican sash, in which was thrust a long knife. His face might have been handsome but for the flatness of his nose. His skin was swarthy, but his eyes were large and full of fire, and his long hair was as soft and silky as that of a female.

Folding his arms, he looked angrily from the boy to the girl.

"Ugh! Why is this?" he said. "Aiden, the Silver-Voice, walks at night with a young pale-face!"

"And what is that to her brother—Hawk-Eye?" inquired Aiden, a little petulantly, two bright, hectic spots on her cheeks adding to her piquant beauty.

"The Silver-Voice knows Hawk-Eye is not her brother!"

"Are you not son of my father, the chief?"

"It is true; but Aiden is not his own daughter. She knows it well."

"She is her own self-right!" returned the maiden, drawing herself up. "What she does is good. Hawk-Eye has not the say of her *do*! He must not crawl like a snake to watch her. Go away!"

"The *pale-face* must go."

"I rather think I have something to say about *that*," answered Guy, spiritedly. "I will not go, unless Aiden wants me to."

The young Indian laid a hand on his tomahawk, and the other as promptly grasped his knife.

"Go!" said the girl to Guy.

Evidently she was prompted by her dread of the quarrel she saw impending.

"Go," she continued, as Guy lingered. "Is it you make disobey the order?"

But the youth found it impossible to leave with those fiery eyes of the young Indian glaring upon him as if seconding the command.

"I would like to punch your head for you first!" he cried angrily.

No sooner were the words uttered than, with the bound of a tiger, the Indian sprung toward the youth, an uplifted tomahawk in his hand.

Silver-Voice darted between the two boys.

"The one who strike first blow, Aiden never make speak to more!" she cried.

Just then there was a crash in the shrubbery.

Three ugly-looking Indians, headed by the half-breed, Satole, sprung forth, the latter leveling his rifle at Guy's head.

CHAPTER VII.

THE PRISONER.

AIDEN threw up the muzzle of the piece ere Satole could pull trigger.

The boy drew his knife and stood at bay.

"So this is your game?" he said, scornfully to the chief's son. "Well, I might have known it! It is like an Indian!"

"No," said the other youth, in a quick, deep voice. "Hawk-Eye fights one to one! He is no squaw! His brothers came not at his bidding! They came without his knowing! I have said it—it is true!"

As he spoke he placed himself between the Indian intruders and the white boy.

"Go back!" he ordered, imperiously. "The scalp of the pale-face is not for you! It is for Hawk-Eye!"

Satole sneered.

"I have your father's orders to capture the boy, dead or alive!" he said, "and bring him before him! His eyes are keen. He has watched Silver-Voice, when she knew it not, making friends with the young pale-face!"

"The white boy has ears. He can hear," said the young Indian, turning to Guy. "He knows now that Hawk-Eye did not bring his brothers to help him. His tomahawk is sharp—his arm is strong. He can help *himself*!"

"I believe you," said Guy, frankly. "You do not look as if you'd tell such a whopping lie about the matter. As to your tomahawk being sharp, your arm strong, and all that fol-de-rol, I can tell you that there is a little 'elbow grease'!"

in my arm as well as yours, and that my knife has a keen edge!"

The Indian youth looked at the speaker with a sort of grim admiration.

"The talk of the pale-face is *common*," he said, "but it is good! The time will come when I will try his *blows*!"

"Let the white boy go!" pleaded Silver-Voice. "The chief may give blame to me. Come! Not much time Silver-Voice have refuse! I will make right with chief."

"No!" cried Satole, sternly. "The boy must not go! Our hunting-grounds are narrow enough—the boy would make them narrower. We have good game in the mountains. He and his people would steal it from us, and drive us even from this place with their powder!"

"Ugh! It is good!" said one of the Indians.

They closed round the lad, and led him off, followed by Aiden and Hawk-Eye, who kept a wary eye on the captors to see that they offered no harm to the prisoner.

A walk of a few miles, through deep thickets and over rough crags, brought them to a green valley, in which were the Indian lodges, consisting of skin tents. Some squaws and children came forth to look at the prisoner, as he was being led straight toward the chief's tent. Finally all entered it, to confront an Indian, with a great breadth of shoulders and a massive breast, which being partly exposed, revealed many scars he had received in battles with his enemies. The chief said nothing to Guy. He called a council of his principal men, and it was debated whether they should take the life of the prisoner, or insist that they would not give him up to his friend, Ned, until he consented to leave the mountains and relinquish his search for gold.

Satole advised death, and made a speech. Hawk Eye was for setting him free at once, and Silver-Voice coming in, seconded him with her pleadings. The chief, stern as he was, seemed moved by the eloquent voice of the beautiful girl, and looked undecided.

"If we let him go," said Satole, "the white men will come and drive us from here! Where then will we go?"

"If we kill this boy," said Hawk-Eye, "his friends will come all the same, to look for him, and Fire-Hair (Fiery Ned) will still live!"

"No!" cried Satole, in a harsh voice. "Leave Fiery Ned to me! His bones shall bleach in a mountain cave! Leave it to me, I say! The gold-seekers' friends will not come to look for them, for they know not of their coming here. Even if they do come, we can say they were killed by falling from a big rock. I tell you this is best."

"It is good!" was echoed among the dark-skinned group of savages about the chief.

Aiden bowed her head in speechless grief, and Guy believed that Satole had sealed his doom.

But the chief still looked undecided.

"It is well," he said, "but the sky grows dark before the storm comes and Red Knife must think before he says 'It is good.'"

While he stood silent and thoughtful, Satole and some of the other Indians went out of the tent.

Aiden now continued her pleading, but the

chief sternly motioned her back. Looking round him at the dark faces of his savage companions, who were watching him intently, he said:

"Bring back Satole and the others. Red-Knife would speak."

Ere the command could be obeyed, the front of the tent parted, and a tall form, rifle in hand, stalked boldly in, walking straight to Guy's side.

It was Fiery Ned!

"Whar is the 'farnal cuss?" he inquired, fiercely, as he glared around him, apparently indifferent to the angry gaze of the savages.

"What want?" inquired the chief.

"What do I want?" roared Ned, in a voice of thunder. "I want that mean skunk, Satole, as did me out of SUKE—whar is he?"

"Red-Knife does not like to hear his friends called names. Does the pale-face hunter think nothing of his life that he comes here? Does he want to leave his scalp in our hands?"

"Git out, you foolish nigger!" said Ned. "Ef yer try to lift my ha'r—by the 'tarnal!—every one of yer gang will be swept from these yere mountains, like cobwebs from a pickle-bar'l! Thar'd be a hundred rifles and bowies on yer trail 'fore you could say ugh! to a boss! But that's nyther hyar nor thar! I want the chap as did me out of SUKE, and ag'in I ask—Whar is he?"

"If the hunter wants him, he must look for him," replied the chief. "He may look for him, if he will go away when he finds him."

"I will go when I git ready," said Ned.

"The hunter must not look longer for gold. He will find none."

Ned brought his rifle down with a thump, and laughed derisively.

"See hyar, old boss!" he cried. "I'm in fur some of them gold lumps, and the man as tries to stop me, gits a bellyful of lead beans, shore as you're born!"

A dozen hands were laid upon tomahawks and knives, whereupon Ned brought the muzzle of his rifle down upon the palm of his hand, with his finger on the trigger.

"Cl'ar the track!" he cried. "Ef yer want fight, fight thar will be! and it'll be the worse for yer in the eend, or yer may sot me down fur a dod-rotted liar! Come, boy, let's leave these diggin's!"

With Guy he coolly walked toward the opening of the tent, the savages giving way before him.

He seemed to be in no hurry to leave the camp. His experience with Indians had shown him that he had succeeded in intimidating them by his mention of the friends who would avenge his death, and he knew he had nothing to fear, at present. He walked from lodge to lodge, vainly searching for Satole.

"The cowardly skunk is in hidin' somewhar," he muttered, at last, "and I only lose time lookin' fur him, now. Hadn't I as good as promised yer father to hunt up the gold place 'fore 'tendin' to anything else. I wouldn't stop till I found the 'farnal nigger!"

"I think you came just in time to save my life," said Guy, as they left the camp.

"It mout be so and it mout not. Thar's no tellin'. You war gone so long that I 'spicioned

somebthin', and so follered yer trail to fotch up whar I did. It all comed 'long o' that little gal—eh?"

"Yes, but it was not her fault. She pleaded for me."

"Hoo! it mout be so, but yer kin never be shore of an Injun, male or shemale!"

"I will not hear a word said against *her*!" cried Guy indignantly. "Do you mean—do you *dare* to imply that she led me into an ambush?"

Fiery Ned stood still for a moment, looking straight into the speaker's eyes.

Then he leaned back from his long rifle, which he held, butt to the ground, and broke into a loud laugh.

"Yes!" cried Guy, now fairly enraged. "Do you dare to say it?" And as he spoke he grasped the haft of his knife.

Had he been a man, Ned would have quarreled with him on the spot. As it was, he held out his hand.

"Boy, I respect yer; I wish I may be dogged ef I don't. I hev nothin' to say ag'in the gal, exceptin' this: remember how SUKE sarved *me*, and be keerful. A woman's a dang'rous critter! worse nor a dozen catamounts! Her ha'r is a sort o' cobwebs—a net for tanglin' mortils like *we*, and ag'in I say, bewar'! Are yer satisfied now?"

"Aiden is no *catamount*!" Guy retorted.

"No, she ain't, boy. It war only a comparison o' mine, meanin' her beyooty war perilous."

The boy now accepted the proffered hand, and the two journeyed on amicably together.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE COMBAT.

NED and his young companion passed the night in a cave.

Next morning early they continued their search for the gold ravine, but, as before, they were unsuccessful.

Guy had temporarily separated from his companion, and was climbing the rugged crags, still looking for the ravine, when, below him, standing on a jutting rock, he saw Aiden beckoning to him.

He was soon at her side, clasping both her little hands.

"Still bad you will be," she said as she withdrew her hands, after she thought he had held them long enough. "I would not have made the meeting, but for the word I promise—to try to show you the gold place. There is the way," she added, pointing toward some lofty peaks in the distance. "I know not exactly *where* it is."

"You say you would not have come to meet me any more but for that?"

"It is the best. It is danger for you—meeting me. It was hard, the getting away from camp without Hawk-Eye seeing. He watches me most all time. He has the jealous!"

"You do not care for him?"

"Some. I like as brother. He is a good boy, but for jealous."

"I understand. He would make you his wife?"

"It is true. I not want make the wife."

"You mean you do not want to be *his* wife?"

"Not *any* wife. I like the free better—the

flowers, the streams, the big rocks with clouds on top."

"Suppose I should ask you to be *my* wife, what would you say?"

Silver-Voice looked down, twining her little hands together before her gaze, as if there seeking for a reply.

"See! your friend come. He is, I make think, coming this way."

Guy looked to see Ned in the far distance, disappearing among a cluster of trees at the base of a precipice.

"He will be a long time reaching us. You can answer me before he comes."

"You have strong persist," said the girl, still looking down. "Plenty time."

"But you said we were not to meet again. That is why I have asked you so soon."

"See once more; once more we make meet," and before he could say another word, away she went, bounding from crag to crag as lightly as a fawn.

"What if, after all, she does love that Hawk-Eye?" muttered the boy to himself aloud, as the girl disappeared round the angle of a steep rock. "I would like to meet the fellow, face to face, and have our quarrel out!" he added, fiercely.

"The white boy says so! Let him prove his words!" came a clear voice, and Hawk-Eye suddenly appeared from behind a rock, not two feet off.

"A spy and eavesdropper!" cried Guy. "By the gollies! I believe you have heard every word I said to Aiden!"

"Hawk-Eye has quick ears! It is true! The white boy and he cannot both tread the mountain rocks! One of us must die. Hawk-Eye is an Indian, but his mother was a half-breed. He is not treacherous like his brothers. He will fight, foot to foot, knife to knife."

As he spoke he drew his silver-mounted knife from its sheath.

In a moment Guy had pulled forth his own blade, and the two boys stood glaring at each other.

Simultaneously they struck out.

The Indian lightly dodged the blow aimed at him, and Guy did the same.

Then they closed, and, for several minutes, their knives glittered and clashed rapidly. The young prospector was not unused to this sort of work. He had practiced it in play with a schoolmate, whose father—a Texan—was a skillful hand with the bowie. Therefore the wounds he received from his opponent, were, owing to his quick expert manner of parrying, merely slight cuts, which would soon heal. But he found, in his adversary, a person also versed in the use of the dagger. In spite of every effort, he was unable to sheathe his knife in the body of the Indian.

As they continued the struggle, writhing, twisting, dodging and striking, Guy's foot caught against a protruding spur, and he fell in such a way as to hurt the wrist of the hand holding the weapon.

Ere he could get up, Hawk-Eye might have plunged his blade into his body. On the contrary, however, he stood back, waiting for the boy to rise.

As Guy regained his feet, he said: "You are

not like most Indians, or you would have taken advantage of that fall!"

"Have I not said that Hawk-Eye was not like the rest of his tribe? He would be open and fair in combat as in all things. To strike a fallen foe is no credit!"

"Well, come on, then!" said Guy, advancing his foot. "Why do you stand back? I am again ready."

"The white boy holds his knife weakly! he has hurt his wrist."

"Never mind that!"

The other's eyes lighted with stern pleasure.

"Hawk-Eye has found a brave foe! It is good! He will glory the more in victory—in getting such a scalp! But he will take no unfair advantage. The left hand, now!"

And as he spoke he changed his knife from his right hand to his left.

Guy did the same, and again the two closed in combat.

At that instant the Indian's knife was sent flying from his grasp, by a blow from a rifle, and a strong hand seizing him by the scruff of the neck, he was hurled down upon his back.

"Cussed young nigger!" came the voice of Fiery Ned, who was in fact the person interfering. "What yer tryin' to do? I'll skin yer alive!"

He placed both knees upon the breast of the prostrate boy, and held his throat with an iron grip, so that, despite his struggles, he was unable to free himself.

"It was a fair fight," said Guy. "Let him up, Ned. We were fighting by mutual consent."

"Nonsense! thar's no mutual atween a red-skin and a white. I'll whip all the fight out of the varmint!"

So saying, in spite of the struggles of the youth, he succeeded, by the exertion of his tremendous strength, which, perhaps, was equal to that of two ordinary men, in turning him over, face downward, and lashing him with his sash.

To describe the rage of the high-spirited boy at such treatment were nearly impossible. All the fire of his soul seemed concentrated in his eyes, and the veins upon forehead and neck were swollen almost to bursting.

Ned understood his feelings. He knew that he could not inflict a greater indignity on an Indian than that of a whipping—that death would have been a thousand times preferable to this brave youth. But the hunter exulted in his sufferings. He took a savage delight in his baffled rage.

"No—no *whip!*" cried Hawk-Eye, in a voice fierce with anger. "Shoot! stab! cut head in two, but no whip!"

"Go it, yer varmint! You kin squarm, and twist, and wriggle as much as yer please, but this child's a-goin' to give yer the most infarnal floggin' that ever mortil heerd on!"

So saying he cut off a piece of the rope he carried, and straddling his legs across the prostrate boy, he raised it on high to deal the first blow.

Up to this period Guy had contented himself by trying the effect of persuasion with the hot-headed hunter, but now, perceiving it was use-

less, the Boy Prospector sprung forward, and, seized the uplifted arm of the infuriated guide.

"No—no! Ned, this is too much!" he shouted. "You must not flog that boy!"

"What? You interfere atween me and a cussed young red nigger? You?"

"It is a foul wrong! Not for all the gold in these hills, would I have that young red-skin flogged!" and with a sudden movement Guy snatched the rope from the man's grasp.

Ned's eyes blazed like those of a wild-cat. He left his position, and confronted Guy, holding out his hand.

"Come, boy, the rope, the rope!"

"Listen to reason, Ned! That Indian has not harmed us. He has behaved toward me in a noble manner!"

"The rope! the rope! don't yer heer?"

"You cannot have it!" decided Guy with firmness.

"I will hev it! By the livin' catamount! don't yer try to balk, me, boy! I don't want to hurt yer, but I sw'ar ef yer don't give me that rope, I'll put a bullet thrugh yer body!"

He cocked his rifle as he spoke, and leveled it at Guy's breast, while the resolute lad also seized his own rifle, cocked it, and pointed it at Ned.

"You'll not live to see my dead body! There'll be *two of us!*" he cried.

A light form glided between them.

It was Silver-Voice.

"Aiden hear loud speak, while she coming back this way!" cried the girl. "Friends not must get the mad. No make quarrel! See!"

And she pointed to the spot where Hawk-Eye had lain, but which was now vacant.

"Hello!" cried Ned, wrathfully, "the young nigger's gone!"

"Yes. Aiden cut lashings. The boy is Aiden's friend and brother!"

"I don't thank yer fur it," growled Ned, "but I s'pose, I must grin and b'ar it!" he added, as the girl laid her two little hands on his arm and looked up sweetly into his face. Somehow them eyes reminds me of Suke's! I didn't know that chap was yer brother, anyhow!"

Ned had never been known to hurt a woman—not the ugliest Indian squaw that ever breathed.

The beautiful girl saw the effect she had produced, and without even a glance at Guy, she darted off, to soon disappear.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BARRICADE.

"Boy," said Ned, after a moment's silence—"that gal are like an angel. She hev made it all right atween us! I war mad at you, but I wouldn't o' shot yer—you know that. I only threatened—thar's the truth!"

Guy laughed.

"You have a dreadful temper, Ned, and I don't know what you might *not* do when you are mad."

"Waal, boy, it's over, now, and let's shake hands."

They did so, after which Guy, pointed out the direction Aiden had given him for reaching the gold ravine.

They started off, climbing over many a jag-

red rock ere they reached a narrow gorge through which they must pass. Having threaded it, they were near the lofty precipices among which Silver-Voice had said they would find the ravine. But, ere they could ascend the first light, a wild, terrific whoop was heard, and more than thirty savages, hideously painted, emerged from a hollow, not far off, flourishing their tomahawks as they came on, headed by Red Knife!

"Hello! so the varmints hev declar'd war!" ejaculated Ned. "I thought it mout be so! This way, boy," he coolly added, as he commenced to climb the precipice in such a way that a ledge partly covered the bodies of his companion and himself.

He made for a pile of large bowlders! near the summit, and not until he and Guy had ensconced themselves behind them, did he attempt to use his rifle, although arrow after arrow had whistled about the ears of the twain during the ascent.

Now, however, he pointed his piece at the foremost savage, and as the sharp report rung, the man fell upon his face, stone dead.

"Now, fur dinner," said Ned, coolly.

Guy looked at him in surprise.

"Could we not choose a better time for it?" he inquired.

"No; them varmints knows that only two at a time kin come up by way of the ledge. They mout clomb up to us from t'other side, thar," he added, pointing to the edge of the precipice behind them, which could be reached by skillful climbers from below, "but they wouldn't onder-take it in the daytime."

The two sat down, and with the remains of their breakfast, consisting of some roasted quail and some corn-cakes, which the hunter had baked on a flat stone, they made a good meal.

"Now," said Ned, "we kin make a barricade of these bowlders, and with that I could stan' alone ag'in' all the niggers in these mountains."

The barricade, consisting of bowlders laid one over the other, as high as a man's breast, was soon erected. It was in the form of a square, and was about eight feet wide.

Night soon came. It was clear weather, with a full moon shedding silver light over the wild mountain scenery, so that objects, except where shadows fell from the rocks, could be distinctly seen.

Ned stood the first watch, while Guy, throwing himself down upon a blanket taken from his wallet, and with the latter for a pillow, soon fell into a deep slumber. At about midnight Ned awoke him for the lookout.

"Be mouty keerful, boy," he said. "Keep yer eyes everywhere. Thar's not an Injun in sight, but yer can't tell whether they're near or not, 'spite o' that. Don't go fur from the barricade. Ef yer want a drink, thar's a spring, not fifty yards from this place, a little bit down the ledge."

A moment later Ned was asleep, while Guy, with his rifle over his shoulder, paced to and fro near the barricade, keeping his body partly sheltered by a line of bowlders which the hunter had put up for that purpose.

At length the boy, feeling thirsty, started

down the ledge to seek the spring his companion had spoken of. He was some minutes searching for it, but he finally heard the noise of the tinkling water, among a mass of rocks that projected out from the edge of the rocky ascent. From his wallet he took a small tin cup he carried, and having filled it, he was drinking, when he was seized in an iron grasp, while a hand was placed over his mouth to prevent his crying out.

In a moment his rifle was snatched from his grasp, and his arms were fastened behind his back, while a bandage of coarse cloth was tied about his mouth. Before this could be done, however, he managed to give one shrill cry to awaken Ned, who sprung at once to his feet. The boy was borne rapidly off by his captors—half a dozen stalwart Indians, who were heedless of the threats of the hunter above, for they knew he would not dare to fire upon them from his fear of hitting his young friend.

Other Indians, concealed among the rocks near the ledge, soon joined the party, and all made off to a rocky valley, where about a hundred of their tribe were collected in temporary lodges of skins, erected on poles, in the form of tents.

Guy was conducted to the lodge of Red-Knife, where the light of a torch fell upon the stern faces of the half-breed, Satole, and a dozen warriors besides the chief.

"Again," said the latter, "we have the young pale-face in our hands. But Red-Knife is good. He would not take the scalp of the boy, although he and his hunter friend have killed some of our best men. If Fire-Hair," for so they termed Ned, on account of his red hair, "will go away from here, we will give up the boy to him; if not, he must die."

"My friend will not consent to give up his search for gold," said Guy, boldly.

"What the boy says is true," remarked Satole. "Why should we lose time when his scalp is ready for us?"

"First we will speak to Fire-Hair," answered Red-Knife. "Yes, we will hear what he has to say."

Guy was kept guarded in the lodge until daylight, when Red-Knife, with some of his warriors, sallied forth, taking the boy with them.

They proceeded to the foot of the precipice, the chief holding up his hand to Ned, who stood far above, leaning over the barricade, as a signal that he would speak with him.

"Go ahead," roared the hunter, "let's heer what yer've got to say."

In a few words the chief shouted out that he would give up the boy if he (Ned) would consent to leave the mountains—to relinquish his search for gold.

"You 'farnal niggers—do yer think yer kin take in a coon which hasseen more Injun skunks than yer kin count. Don't I know what yer up to? Don't I know that yer preposals are all nonsense to put me off my guard? Ef I could save the boy that way, I'd do it, but I know better. You'd kill him all the same, and lift my ha'r, too. And now jest listen: Ef yer harm that boy, thar won't be an Injun of yer tribe left in these yere mountains in four weeks from now!"

The chief, finding that all efforts to change Ned's resolution were useless, went back with Guy to the lodge.

He was there kept confined until the afternoon of that day, when he was led forth and bound to a rock with tough thongs.

A number of savages, headed by Red-Knife, came and took up a station within about a hundred yards of him.

When he saw one of them unsling his bow from his shoulders, he knew what fate was in store for him—that he was to be made a target of for the arrows of the party.

The rock to which he was bound rose near the edge of a deep thicket. Just back of it, and growing up near the sides were thick bushes, with a swift stream gliding past it into the very heart of the woods.

Half a dozen young Indians now stepped forth from the large party confronting the lad and adjusted their arrows to their bow strings.

Guy gave himself up for lost.

Meanwhile, he looked in vain for his late antagonist, Hawk-Eye. That youth was not among the party of savages who were to shoot.

As the young Indians were fitting their arrows and trying the strings of their bows, a small hand, holding a sharp knife, was suddenly thrust around the edge of the rock, and the low voice of Aiden, as with three quick blows she severed his bonds, fell upon the ears of the surprised lad.

"Quick! run you behind rock and jump in cave!"

Guy was not slow to obey the mandate. He darted behind the rock, into the thicket, and there, by the bank of the stream, he beheld Aiden's canoe, with the girl now standing in it.

He sprung into it, and, in a moment, the maiden loosened the warp, which she had fastened to a root projecting from the bank.

With her paddle she guided the frail vessel, which was swept along with tremendous velocity by the swift current.

Meanwhile the yells of the savages were heard behind, and their painted faces were seen peering through the trees, on the bank, after the receding canoe.

The presence of the girl in the vessel prevented all except Satole from discharging any missile at it.

The half-breed taking aim with his rifle at Guy, sent a bullet after the youth. Fortunately it missed, just grazing the boy's temple.

"You have saved my life!" cried the lad, gratefully, to the girl.

"Not yet," she answered, smiling. "You too venturesome boy. You go too far from barricade. That's why the capture."

"Yes, but I am safe now. I am sorry, though, the Indians have my rifle."

"You much brave. You think of rifle at such time. Know that we not safe yet."

"Where will this current take us to?"

"About two mile. Then we come to rocks in stream, and canoe not can go more far. Indians run after us. They have light heel. They would catch up with us, but shrubbery and briers on bank so thick it take them much time to get through."

Before long Guy saw the rocks of which the girl had spoken, in the stream, ahead. The maiden directed the canoe toward a jutting point of land, covered with shrubbery. As the craft approached it, the boy was startled to see the face of an Indian thrust through the bushes, watching them.

The Indian presently emerged on the bank, and the youth recognized Hawk-Eye.

He held a rifle, and Guy expected to see him point it his way.

What was his surprise when, instead of doing so, he extended the weapon toward him.

He sprung to land and received his rifle.

"Hawk-Eye have trouble get it, but he get it, for he can no longer have anger for the white boy, who has proved himself his brother. He can now only do him good, for did he not try to save him from being whipped by Fire-Hair? It is well!"

So saying, he waved his hand, and plunging into the thicket, disappeared.

Aiden, bidding Guy follow her, led him to a narrow path among the rocks.

"Good by," she said. "We again make the meeting. Keep along path, and you get to Fire-Hair, but you must be careful."

She entered the thicket, and was soon lost to the gaze of the boy, who now hurried in the direction she had pointed out to him.

CHAPTER X.

FACE TO FACE.

KEEPING along the path which wound among the rugged elevations of the mountains, Guy finally reached a point which afforded him a view of his friend, Ned, who stood behind the barricade, looking keenly along the ledge.

There the boy beheld several savages crouched among the rocks near the spring, probably hoping Ned would come there for water, when they would be able to effect his capture.

The boy, quickly descending from his position, gained the base of the precipice where it sloped down behind the barricade. He looked up at the rocks, which here and there projected from the rugged wall and among which a party of Indians might easily have concealed themselves.

This was the only direction, however, he could now take to reach the hunter, and having examined his piece to make sure it was loaded and in good condition, he commenced the ascent.

He was more than half-way up, keeping a wary eye upon the rocks above him near the summit, when all at once he beheld the barrel of a rifle pointed toward him from behind one of the masses.

Instinctively he threw himself down flat against the wall of the precipice, which was here slightly hollowed.

The movement was a fortunate one, for a seconds later the piece rung sharply and the youth heard the whiz of the bullet over the back of his head.

Scarcely had the report died away when Ned appeared on the summit of the precipice and, looking down, seemed to comprehend at a glance what had taken place.

Ten feet below him, still crouched behind the rock whence he had fired, was the half-breed, Satole, reloading his piece.

"Hillo! by the 'tarnal!" broke from the hunter's lips, and then, with the celerity of a panther, he descended the rugged wall toward the man, whom, of all others, he was the most desirous of meeting.

"Up to the top, boy!" he roared to Guy. "Quick, young hoss! Thar's no time to lose, and leave this dratted skunk to me!"

Guy obeyed. He reached the summit of the precipice and looked toward the rocks near the spring. The Indians there did not show themselves, and now, turning his gaze downward, he saw Ned snatch the yet unloaded rifle from Satole's grasp and confront him, knife in hand.

He had slung his own piece to his back, although he might easily have shot down his foe with it even from the summit of the precipice.

"Waal!" cried the hunter, in a low, deep voice of concentrated rage, "hyar we be ag'in, face to face! Look at me, Satole, and tell me ef yer don't think this are a glorious meeting!"

The face of the half-breed turned of an ashen hue. His gaze met that of Ned and seemed locked to his as if by a sort of fascination. He was not a coward, but he knew the sort of man who now confronted him, and felt that his doom was sealed.

"You very mad at me, Ned Robinson," he said. "Why, I don't know. It was not my fault that Suke chose me instead of you. I married her, but I soon tired of her, and here I am, among the Indians. I knew from the first when you set out on this tramp and it was to keep you from it and from being killed by the Indians, that I tried every trick to turn you back. It was I who moved the arm of the skeleton Indian to frighten you. I had a thread tied to the arm, and there is a hollow in the rock behind it, where I concealed myself. It was all done for your good. You see I am of a more forgiving nature than you."

"Liar!" hissed Ned, showing his sharp, white teeth. "It was to save me, p'r'aps, that you cut the tree-trunk bridge, over the torrent, and fired at me arterward! Eh? yer mean, dirty varmint! what hev yer to say to that?"

"I did not think I cut it so that it would give way, and— Take that, beast of a white man, and see how you like it!"

He had drawn his knife, all of a sudden, with his left hand, and sprung upon the hunter, aiming a swift blow at his heart.

But Ned knew well the treacherous character of the man he had to deal with, and was prepared for the movement. With a tremendous blow he drove his knife clean through the wrist of the half-breed, who, uttering a yell of pain, dropped his weapon from his nerveless, bleeding fingers!

"Thar!—thar's a tricky traitor's wages! Had yer stood up with me, and fou't face to face—a good squar' fight—thar'd hev been no sech work! Now you're at my mercy, Satole, and I could skin yer alive ef so be I wanted, but that's nither hyar nor thar! Pick up yer knife, and we kin still hev a good fight! Thar's still a chance fur ye, ef you act like a man!"

"How can I fight with my wrist this way?"

said Satole. "The pain and loss of blood weaken me."

As he spoke, he made a spring from the rock on which he stood to another, and then, with his one hand, commenced to rapidly descend the precipice.

"No, Satole, you don't git away from me!" shouted Ned, as he lightly descended after the fugitive.

He caught up to him, just as he reached a projecting ledge, about twenty feet above the valley below, and seized him by the throat with an iron grasp.

"Yer time hev come, Satole!" he cried.

The half-breed tried to dig his fingers into Ned's eyes.

"Curse you!" he yelled. "I'll gouge your eyes, and blind you before you kill me, Ned Robinson!"

"Will yer? Ef yer try the goug'in' game, yer'll fail hyar, I kin tell you," answered the other. "By the livin' catamount! yer've got my mad up, now, Satole, beyond the b'ilin' p'int!"

He easily escaped his opponent's fingers by throwing back his head, and by twisting the man's wrist so that the joints fairly cracked. The next moment his long knife was sheathed in his enemy's heart.

"Thar!" he roared, thrusting the dying man away from him, and allowing the bleeding body to roll down into the valley below. "Go back to yer Injuns, Satole, what's left of yer!"

So saying the hunter ascended to the hight, and was soon with the boy, who had watched with horror the scene enacted beneath him.

"Your ways, Ned, are too bloodthirsty to suit me," he said.

"Nonsense; you're too soft-hearted, as I told you before. The only way to deal with sech chaps, are the one you've jest see'd! T'otherwise he'd hev found some chance, maybe, to sarcumvent both on us."

"What puzzles me," said Guy, "is that he did not shoot you when he had a good chance. He has, it seems, been dogging us all along."

"As thar war an Injun with him, all the time—one e' the sons of the chief, he probable wouldn't let him shoot. The raskil must hev, somehow, found time to cut the bridge 'thout the Injun's knowin' it. Now, boy, let's heer how you 'scaped."

Guy told him.

"Thunder!" cried Ned, when he heard of Hawk-Eye's generous conduct to the lad. "I'm kind o' sorry, now, I war goin' to flog that chap. He are a trump, arter all, but he's lost the friendship of his own tribe by sech doin's. He kin 'sociate with 'em no more. They'll never forgive him."

Having learned from Guy that there were Indians lurking among the rocks, near the spring, Ned fired a few shots in that direction, which soon dislodged the savages, and sent them scampering down the ledge.

CHAPTER XL.

FATAL NEWS.

As night approached Ned and his young companion knew that the cliff they occupied was

surrounded by savages, lurking among the rocks, about the base of the height.

"No sleep fur me, to-night," said the hunter. "Better lie down, boy, and git what rest you kin."

"No, as I slept during the daytime, I feel wide-awake. I will watch with you."

Scarcely had he spoken, when, with a wild whoop, the savages came swarming to the attack by way of the ledge and also up the back side of the precipice.

"Now, boy," said Ned, coolly. "Try and make every shot tell. Don't hold yer rifle too long on the aim, when yer squint 'long the hind-sights, as that's apt to make yer arm onsteady. You kin see to them varmints comin' up the back of the precipice, and I'll 'tend to them on the ledge, with old Sixty."

The report of old Sixty was soon heard. Ned did fearful execution, felling a savage at every shot, and causing the remainder to cower back among the rocks, near the spring which would afford them some slight protection. Meanwhile, Guy also did well with his piece. The Indians retreated down the rugged wall, and finally appeared to desert the place.

"What cowardly creatures," remarked the boy to the hunter.

"It's the niggers' way," answered Ned. "They'll never keep up a fight, unless they kin hev everything as they want it. Thar goes the rest on 'em," he added, as the Indians who had remained among the rocks, near the spring, were seen skulking off.

"Do you think that all have gone?"

"I'm pooty shore ov it, but that's so as to draw us from this place, into one of ther 'fernal ambooshes. As it is, I think we hev lounged heer long enough. We'll never find yer father's gold, ef we stay, and I'm fer movin' on. In fact we're out of previsions, and must hev game to live on, Injuns or no Injuns. Come, boy."

They descended the rocky wall, and were soon in the valley below.

They had moved forward about thirty yards, and were in a narrow defile, bordered by masses of rocks, which would have afforded their enemies an excellent place for an ambush, when Ned paused.

"Stay heer, boy, while I go forrard and take a survey," he said. "Ef yer heer the varmints whoop, yer kin come up to help me."

The hunter moving forward, was soon lost to Guy's view amongst the rugged masses ahead.

A few minutes had passed, when the lad heard, near him, two voices which he recognized.

One was Aiden's, the other was that of the chief's son, Hawk-Eye.

"It is well, Silver-Voice," said the Indian youth. "I have spoken, and I must go. There is no more joy for Hawk-Eye. He thought in time the Silver-Voice would share his lodge, but he knows now that the white boy has stolen her heart. When first he thought this it put fire in his brain, and nerved him to kill his rival. But he has seen that this rival has a noble spirit, and has proved himself his brother. He would not harm him now, for he is good, and he is the chosen of Silver-Voice. Again I

say it is well. Not long will I be with my people. I go away—a wanderer—a miserable root-digger, and I shall die far from my tribe!"

His voice was sad. Its mournfulness appeared to touch the heart of the young girl.

"Make not such speak," she said. "Silver-Voice will ever look upon Hawk-Eye as her friend and brother! Why should he go away? His people may know nothing of the part he took in helping the white boy to escape. Stay, Hawk-Eye! stay with us!"

Guy could not hear the rest of what was said, as the two were moving further from him while they spoke, but he made a magnanimous resolution then and there. If his rival could be generous, he could be so, too.

"What, after all, could the Indian girl ever be to him, that he should interfere between these two people? He would meet her no more, and when she found such to be the case, her heart might finally turn favorably toward the other youth.

He had just come to this conclusion when he heard a light step near him, and, turning, he beheld Silver-Voice standing before him, with the rays of light penetrating the defile from the full moon overhead, falling upon her beautiful face.

"What you do here?" she inquired. "Why not in the barricade?"

"I am waiting for my friend," he replied.

"You make wrong, both, leaving barricade," she said. "Indians will get you. The people of Red-Knife are cunning."

"Where are they now?"

"Far from here, but they will soon be on your trail."

"Silver-Voice," said Guy. "Without intending it, I have just overheard a part of your talk with Hawk-Eye. I think it is best we meet no more."

"Not meet?" she faltered.

A look of keen sorrow clouded her face.

"No; you will probably never agree to leave your people and become my wife. Why, then, the use of our meeting? In time you can share the wigwam of Hawk-Eye."

"You quick tire of Silver-Voice, boy. Yes, very quick!" and she looked down.

"No, I am not tired of you, but it is not right for me to rob Hawk-Eye of his intended bride."

"Silver-Voice would never be his bride. This is for the excuse. You no care for me longer. Good-by. I go."

She turned as if to leave him. Their eyes met, both full of love and regret.

She staggered toward him and fell into his arms.

So much for his resolution. He spoke no more of giving her up, but showered kisses upon her face, her necks and her lips.

"Bad boy—there! That must make stop!"

Divinely beautiful in her blushes and tears, she disengaged herself from his arms, and glided off, as the approaching steps of Ned were heard.

"Come, boy," said the hunter, "thar's no niggers on the way."

The two moved forward, as fast as they could in the dim light.

By midnight Ned perceived that Guy was nearly worn out. He found a hollow in a rock for him to lie down in, while he stood watch.

The boy did not awaken until just before dawn. Then he was aroused by a terrific war-whoop.

He sprang up, rifle in hand. Ned was not in sight. The lad, fearing the worst, advanced in search of him, and he had already nearly reached the edge of a gorge, when he felt an iron grasp upon his wrist.

"Hist!" came the voice of Ned—"down, boy, down! Don't let 'em see yer, or yer'll spile my strategy."

As the lad crouched behind the rock where his companion stood, the latter stated that he had seen a party of their enemies enter the gorge. He had uttered the whoop to scare them away—to make them think they were about to be attacked by the Mandans, one of the neighboring tribes, with whom they were at war.

"The varmints hev all scampered," continued Ned, "and we now hev only to cross that gorge to climb up among the peaks whar yer father's gold are to be found. It are onfortunit that Aiden couldn't describe to us 'zactly the place whar it are."

"That is because she has never been there. She has only heard the chief speak of the golden ravine."

"It would be mouty disapp'intin' ef it are not thar at all."

"We can believe what Aiden says!" replied Guy.

"Sartint, but I meant that the chief hisself mout o' been mistook. 'All are not gold that glitters.'"

A few minutes later, having reconnoitered and made sure that the Indians had left the gorge, Ned and his companion entered it. They were soon climbing the thickly wooded peaks on the other side of it.

"Hyar we are!" cried the hunter, when, at last they reached the summit. "We mout keep a hundred of the niggers at bay from this place, but I don't mean to stay hyar longer than it'll take ter git somethin' to eat. Wait fer me, boy and keep a sharp lookout."

So saying, he glided off, disappearing in the shadows of the thicket.

A quarter of an hour later the boy heard the report of a rifle, and knowing that Ned never wasted a shot, he looked for his return.

An hour passed, and still the hunter did not appear.

Guy was about to go in quest of him, when he beheld Aiden approaching.

Her face was sad. She motioned Guy back as he came forward to meet her. Reaching his side, she said, with tears in her eyes:

"You wait for Fire-Hair?"

"Yes."

"Then long the wait!"

"What do you mean, Silver-Voice?"

"Fire-Hair been taken prisoner!"

"I will rescue him, then! Tell me where he is."

The girl solemnly pointed upward.

"Perhaps there!" she said. "Red-Knife got his scalp."

CHAPTER XII.

THE PERILOUS PASSAGE.

GUY stared at Aiden like one in a stupor. It had seemed to him that the hunter was almost invulnerable, though *why* he could not have explained.

"You are sure of what you say?" he cried.

"I saw the blow given—I saw your friend fall!"

And the tears flowed fast from her eyes as she spoke.

Guy bowed his head.

The girl laid her hand on his arm. "Brave boy, you must give up the look for gold now—you must go back and bring plenty men with you, if you want. Red-Knife is on your trail. Aiden will be your guide and friend—she will show the way back."

"And when we get back will you remain with me?"

She said not a word, but she put both her little hands in his.

"Yes, I will make you my wife, Silver-Voice! You will be dearer to me than a valley full of gold."

"Boy, you make *many* happiness for Silver-Voice," answered the girl. "But will the love for her be always?"

"Yes; but you have not yet told me that you love me as I do *you*."

"No, I not can say that."

"What?"

"Silver-Voice is not very tall, but her heart is big. It is not big enough for her love. Too much the feeling for the speak. Boy, have you the satisfy now?"

"Yes."

"Then you give up the look for gold, and we go away!"

"I did not say that. I must first find the gold, for it is my father's wish. *Then* we will go."

Vainly she pleaded with him, telling him of his danger.

"Help me to reach the gold ravine," he said. "I *will* find it, or die in the attempt!"

"Red-Knife now is between you and the place."

"Can we not get around him and his men by taking some other route?"

"No."

She reflected a moment, and then said:

"You wait for me. I go and try see where Red-Knife is, now."

He watched her until she disappeared from his gaze.

Hour after hour passed, and she did not return. The boy feared that Red-Knife kept her a prisoner. He concluded to move on alone. The death of his friend had saddened without discouraging him.

He was soon groping his way among the crags in the thicket. Finally a huge cliff with sides too steep to climb, barred his progress. Inspecting it, however, he discovered an opening in its base, disclosing a dark passage.

Where did this passage lead to?

Would it take him to the other side of the cliff, and enable him to keep on his way?

He resolved to make the trial. The passage widened as he proceeded. The roof was about

eleven feet high—the sides contained hollows and alcoves.

Seeing no light ahead to indicate that there was an opening in that direction, he paused, undecided whether to keep on or to retrace his way. He concluded to proceed, and a few yards further on, he passed a jutting rock, which he discovered had been the cause of his not seeing the further opening. Now he saw it and something else besides—the outline of an Indian's head, as he peered into the passage. Over the shoulder of this person he beheld the heads of other savages. He looked toward the other opening, thinking it best to return, when to his dismay, he beheld the face of an Indian also there. The dusky outline of his form could be seen, as he started to advance on tip-toe, his tomahawk in his right hand, while, with the left, he beckoned to others to follow him.

Guy at once realized that his enemies suspected his presence in the dark passage. They had evidently struck his trail and followed it to this place! In this situation—hemmed in as he was—he ensconced himself in a hollow at one side of the passage, holding his rifle ready and resolved to defend himself bravely so long as he was able. The advancing Indians came cautiously on. He could see the outlines of their forms as they advanced, peering on each side of them.

The lad took aim and fired.

The report of the piece in the narrow passage was deafening.

The whoops of the savages, now advancing from both ends of the passage, rung fiercely. One of their number had fallen. A couple of arrows came whistling along. Had they not glanced off from a projecting rock, they would have passed through the boy's body.

Guy now loaded and fired as fast as he could, first on one side and then on the other.

This impeded the advance of the cautious savages, who endeavored to keep their bodies screened in the side hollows of the passage as they came on.

At last, just as he had fired a useless shot, he saw one party close upon him—not ten feet distant, rushing toward him, while the others, not much further off, were also coming up.

Perceiving they would reach him ere he could reload, he had recourse to his pistol.

Taking aim at the foremost Indian, he fired, shooting him down.

The rest did not slacken their pace. They bounded over the dead body of their prostrate companion, and half a dozen uplifted tomahawks were ready to be hurled at the lad's skull, when, all at once, he felt an iron grasp upon the back of his collar, and he was drawn quickly upward to a broad, flat rock, projecting over his head, and which was in deep shadow!

The smoke from his rifle not having yet passed away from about the position he had occupied, the Indians, when they aimed their tomahawks, had not known exactly the spot where he stood, but had formed a correct judgment of it from the fire of his piece. Not at present being able to see him, they knew nothing of what had just occurred, but, with a savage yell of triumph hurled their weapons, which struck the rocky wall.

In a moment they perceived that their young enemy was gone—a fact which astonished them.

What had become of him?

Hither and thither they ran, vainly searching every nook and hollow.

That he was somewhere there they felt sure. There was doubtless some secret recess, which they would be unable to discover without the help of torches. Finally all retreated to each end of the passage.

Meanwhile Guy, surprised at his unlooked-for rescue, could obtain no glimpse, in the deep gloom, of his preserver's face. The latter, whoever he was, spoke not a word, but pressed the hand of the boy, as a signal for him to lie silent and motionless.

In a few minutes after the Indians had retreated to the openings, one of them, followed by others, advanced with a lighted pine knot.

The lad felt his rescuer move slightly. He was a little turned from the boy, but some of the torch-light fell upon him revealing the fringed leggins of an Indian, and also a part of a red Mexican sash.

"It is Hawk-Eye!" thought the youth. The roar of his rescuer's rifle smote his ears. The Indian with the torch, fell dead, the light was extinguished, and the passage was again in darkness.

"Thar, boy, we've balked the niggers fur the present, but whether we ever git out of this 'farnal hole or not, remains to be see'd!"

The voice was that of the person by Guy's side, and, to his blended amazement and joy, he now knew that it was NED ROBINSON who had saved him!

"Ned! is it possible I hear aright—that you are alive?"

"Ef I warn't, yer kin be shore ye wouldn't o' heerd old 'Sixty' grunt!" answered Ned, alluding to his rifle.

"But Aiden told me she saw you scalped!"

"Murder! yer don't say! Then that poor Hawk-Eye are sartintly gone under! The Injuns hev killed him."

"I don't understand."

"Heer's how it war. Arter I left you, I got into a dell, whar I see'd an elk. Jest as I fired at it, Hawk-Eye comes dashin' along, wounded! I asks him what war the matter, and I'arned that he war bein' pursued by some o' his people, who wanted to kill him fur the treason of helpin' you. They had already wounded him with an arrer, and he war weak from loss of blood.

"'I'll be yer friend,' said I, 'fer the good turn yer've done the boy that war with me.'

"I drew him into a holler, on a high rock, determined to do my best fur him, and stood guard by his side. Presently 'long came the niggers who war arter him, but they did not see us, and passed. Not long arter that, who should we see but the Injuns of *another* tribe—the Mandans—enemies to the one to which Hawk-Eye belonged.

"By the way they were skulkin' about, I reckined that the woods war pooty full on 'em. Hawk-Eye wanted to git off, so as to make tracks as fur away from his people as he could. He war downhearted—said he had nothin' to live fur, and so on, but I tried to cheer him up.

I made him change clothes with me, so that ef the enemies of his tribe should hev see'd him, they wouldn't hev harmed him, thinkin' he war a white hunter—for they are, or *hev* been friends to the whites—I am shore of that, as I *hev* been among 'em. Waal, he then went off one way and I another, but, by this time, the Injuns who had been skulkin' about, had gone—the Lord only knows whar!

"I war makin' fur the spot whar I had left the deer, when I heard a whoop, and see'd fur off, through the trees, fur an instant, Hawk-Eye's people again chasin' him. What become o' the poor chap I did not know until you jest said that Aiden had told you she see'd the Injuns take my ha'r. That makes all clear as a whistle. The gal see'd the varmints strike Hawk-Eye with their tomahawks, and as he had my clothes on, and war probable some distance from her, she tuck him fur me, and hurried to you with the news. I found the deer, and war makin' fur the place whar I had left yer, when a party of the cussed skunks rose on a suddint ahead o' me, and comed fur me. As I war then jest in front of this passage, I dropped the deer, and thought it war best to dodge in hyar, hoping the raskils would pass, so I could keep on and git to you. But they see'd me go in, and war comin' this way, when, with the rope I hev, I made a noose, and, flingin' it over this yere rock, I clombed up. Not long arter, you came in, and then the varmints which were lurkin' near, a-waitin' fur me to come out, put arter you, as you hev see'd."

As Ned concluded, the two became aware of a crackling noise, followed by a strong smell of smoke.

"Drat the niggers!" cried Ned, "they have sot fire to brush, on both sides o' the passage, that we kin either stay heer to be smothered to death, or allow ourselves to be smoked out, and then hev our ha'r lifted!"

The smoke rolling into the passage soon became suffocating.

"Thar's a hole up thar, near the roof, ef we could only reach it," said Ned, "but thar's the trouble! The rock is smooth, and thar's nothin' fur my rope to catch on, ef I throw it. I see'd the hole by the light of the torch."

"How do you know we could escape that way?" inquired Guy.

"Because this are not the fust time I've been in these diggin's. A year agone I war huntin' in these very parts, and, durin' a storm, I got in a hollow. I follered it up a little way, and looked down through the hole above to which it tuck me, upon this yere very platform. I am shore of it, for I had a torch with me, and had a good look."

Soon the passage became unbearable. The two occupants must either leave it, or stay there to perish.

"Come, boy," gasped Ned. "We mout as well die fightin' fur lite, as to stay heer and knock under. Foller me! We'll make a rush fur the entrance."

Guy, who had reloaded his rifle, was about to leap with Ned from the platform, that the two might sally forth to engage in a hopeless combat for life against overwhelming numbers,

when the well-known voice of Aiden was heard above their heads.

"Boy, are you there?"

"Yes!" replied the youth, "and my friend Ned is with me. Can you save us?"

"Here! Quick! Catch this, and climb!" cried the girl.

In the faint light shed through the passage by the fire the Indians had kindled at both ends outside, the two beheld a long, tough vine, which the maiden had lowered, dangling near them. As she had fastened the upper end to a projecting rock inside the opening, they soon climbed up to the place where she stood.

CHAPTER XIII.

AIDEN'S FEAT.

"THAR'S a plucky gal!" said Ned. "She's saved our lives. She reminds me more and more of SUKE—exceptin', of course, the way that angel sarved me in the eend!"

The three were soon at the entrance of this upper cave.

"Aron't you surprised, gal, to find me alive?" continued Ned. "'Cordin' to yer last accounts, yer see'd my ha'r raised."

"No. Aiden make the error," she answered; "but she learned the truth not long ago. She overheard her people in the woods speaking about Hawk-Eye, how he wore Fire-Hair's dress."

"By this time, gal, you must hev made enemies of yer people. They could not forgive you for helping the boy to escape."

"I have not been with them since then. Many hiding-places I know among woods and mountains. Red-Knife kill poor Aiden, now, could he find her!"

"Remain with us," said Guy. "Your people shall walk over our dead bodies ere they harm a hair of your head!"

"That they sartintly shall," said Ned, as he squinted along "Old Sixty," to make sure the piece was in good order.

"Yes. Aiden must make the stay with you, now," replied the girl. "No longer has she a friend among her people."

"Thar'll be music 'bout these diggin's 'fore long," said the hunter. "Did yer know, Silver-Voice, that a large war-party of the Mandans are arter yer tribe?"

"Yes, and that makes the less danger for you and the boy."

"Sartint, but I wish I had my own nateral su't on," added Ned, looking down at the fringed Indian leggins, reaching scarcely to his ankles. "I feel sorter as ef thar war an Injun in me fightin' ag'in' myself. By the way, do yer think yer can now guide us to the gold ravine?"

"I will make the try," was the answer. "It cannot be far from here, but too late may we reach it."

"What yer mean, Silver-Voice?"

"Not two hours ago, I heard Red-Knife make the order to many of his men, to go and *let in the waters* upon the gold ravine."

"The waters?"

"Yes. A swift stream rushes toward the ravine—high above it, but it is turned away by a rock, which keeps it from pouring into the

hollow. Red-Knife would make the remove of these rocks, so the water could flood the place."

"By the 'tarnal! this must be perverted! Quick, gal, lead us to the spot, ef yer kin!"

"I not have the know exactly where it is, but I try make the guide."

The three moved forward. The boy would have been glad of an excuse to help Aiden, but this nimble girl of the mountains needed no assistance. With the lightness of a deer, she climbed the crags and leaped over the ravines in her way.

Finally Ned made a halt.

"I am mortil hungry," he said. "I'll hev to let off old Sixty, even ef the noise draws the Injuns this way."

"No—no!" said the girl.

From a wallet which she now carried, she produced some meal-cakes and some venison, which made the three an excellent repast.

They then resumed their journey, to soon reach the border of a swift, rushing torrent, ahead of which was a cataract, descending, in a broad sheet of water, to the distance of about twenty feet, into a stream below.

There was a bark canoe in a little cove among the rocks.

"It is Red-Knife's canoe," said the girl, looking round her, in alarm. "He has been here!"

Ned shot a keen glance into the thicket, on the other side of the torrent. There was no wind, and yet there was a slight movement of a line of bushes, about twenty yards from the water.

The next moment a shower of arrows came whizzing toward the trio, followed by the whooping of twenty savages, as they sprung from the shrubbery, making for a tree which served for a bridge over the torrent.

Up went Ned's rifle, and, as he fired, one of the Indians measured his length on the ground.

At the same time another whoop was heard in the rear of the little party, and they beheld more of Red-Knife's men coming up behind them.

"Hillo! hemmed in, shore as thar's catamounts!" cried the hunter, as he proceeded to reload.

"Too many," said Aiden. "They soon get the scalp."

"Thar'll be fewer on 'em to enjoy it, when they git mine," said Ned.

Guy fired at the savages coming in the rear, and this slightly checked their advance.

Ned drew the boy and also the Indian girl into a rocky hollow, just in time to escape a shower of arrows which now darkened the air.

"We'll lose our ha'r, sartint!" said the hunter. "But we'll fight hard, fust, my boy."

"Yes," said Guy. "I will do my best."

"This way. Make follow me!" cried Aiden.

As she spoke she sprung into the canoe.

"What yer goin' to do?" inquired Ned. "The current will carry you over the falls!"

"Come," said Silver-Voice. "Come! I show the way!"

The two got into the canoe, then loosening the warp from a spur of rock to which it was

fastened, the girl allowed the current to carry the frail vessel along toward the cataract.

"By the Lord! we're as good as rubbed out!" cried Ned. "Silver-Voice, are yer crazy?"

"Have not the doubt. I have done it before!" replied the girl.

On went the canoe, with great velocity. The rocks bordering the torrent would shelter the occupants from the arrows of the foe, until they should reach the edge.

Soon the light vessel was in the broad sheet of water, pouring over the rock that hung above the stream below.

With one swift rush, away went the canoe, shooting the falls with lightning speed!

So steady did Silver-Voice keep the little craft that it descended the cataract with an even keel, and, striking the stream where there were no rocks, it remained upright, although half-full of water!

Aiden quickly bailed it out; then, again seizing the paddle, she directed it rapidly along with the current which here was moderate.

"Thunder!" ejaculated Ned, as a bend in the stream hid the baffled Indians above from sight.

"You are a wonderful gal, Silver-Voice."

"I've see'd somethin' like this done by Injuns before, but never by one of your sect."

Guy looked at her with an admiration, which a creature so gentle and yet so brave was well calculated to arouse.

"Afraid never get to gold ravine," said Aiden, with an air of one not conscious that she had done anything remarkable. "Indians watch for us, now, all time. They get water in ravine, too."

"We kin wait, Silver-Voice," said Ned. "I'm not to be balked by all the Injuns in the universe, unless the varmints kill me, fust."

Aiden kept along the stream a few miles. Then she directed the canoe to land, and fastened the warp to one of the trees of a beautiful grove.

The three went ashore, and Ned selected a hill as a good site for another barricade. This latter he made of logs, which he cut down with the hatchet, with which, among other things he was supplied. Until night he was thus employed, but the next day his rifle rung at intervals, and a good supply of game was obtained.

In the afternoon of the next day, Aiden having pointed out the direction in which she supposed the gold ravine to lie, the hunter and Guy went to reconnoiter.

Just before daybreak they had heard terrific whoops in the far distance, with other noises, which seemed to indicate that a combat was taking place, and it was believed that Red-Knife and his people had met with the Mandans and were fighting. This inspired them with hopes that their enemies had been driven from the vicinity of the gold ravine.

CHAPTER XIV.

A SURPRISE.

NED and his young companion soon were among the lofty peaks of the mountains.

They reached the same torrent along which Aiden had guided the canoe when she shot the

falls. Crossing it by the bridge they entered the thicket.

A walk of a mile among rocks and crags brought them to a swift stream, running in a channel which it seemed to have worn in a lofty plateau.

"Hyar we are," said Ned, joyfully. "Ef I are not mouty mistook we hev reached the stream which Red-Knife, 'cordin' to Aiden, war goin' to let down into the gold ravine."

"And our enemies seem to have been driven off," said Guy, "there's no sign of them about here now."

"Of that I'm not so shore," averred Ned, casting his keen eyes upon some moss, in which he fancied he could detect the fresh track of moccasins.

He now proceeded with more caution as the two followed the stream.

Finally they saw where the latter, barred by a wall of rock ahead, was turned away from its course. The rocky wall showed signs of having lately been much battered. In fact it now rose only to the hight of about five feet above the water.

"T'other side o' that wall we'll see the gold ravine," said Ned, confidently.

Guy could not repress a cry of joy.

"In my opinion Red-Knife's people war driven off by the Mandans 'fore they could finish the'r work. Thunder! it war a close shave. A few more blows would o' smashed the rock and sent the water down into the ravine."

The two soon reached the wall. They climbed to the top and looked down.

A cry of disappointment escaped them.

Where was the gold ravine? They saw only confused masses of rocks with rifts and hollows between them.

"Drat the thing," cried Ned. "I begin to think thar's no sech place, arter all—that yer father war in some way mistook!"

Scarcely had he spoken, when from among a pile of rocks near him rose five fierce-looking savages.

They were not of Red-Knife's tribe. They were better dressed, all having deerskin leggins and mantles, and three were armed with rifles.

Each held his tomahawk menacingly, which surprised Ned, for he knew these people were of the tribe, which, at last accounts, he had heard were friendly to the whites.

The hunter brought the muzzle of his rifle down upon the palm of his hand, and stood on the defensive.

"Hillo!" he cried. "I b'lieve it are not war with pale-faces; but yer look as ef the hatchet had been dug up ag'in. Come! out with it—are it *fight* or peace atween us?"

A tall, handsome savage advanced.

"Ugh!" he ejaculated. "This is Fire-Hair! I have seen him before. His name goes far!"

"Yes, I war among yer people, some years ago, but I don't remember yer face."

"Boy, then—chief, now!" answered the Indian, proudly.

"Waal, out with it—are it peace or war?"

"Peace if pale-face go away from here—war if he stay. I have said it."

Ned glided, followed by Guy, behind a rock, which might serve as a sort of barricade.

"Look hyar, chief! I'm arter gold, and thar's no Injun livin' will keep me back, 'thout rubbin' me out, fust. Thar's my sentiments, and thar's old *Sixty*!"

As he spoke he leveled his piece across the rock at the savage party.

At that moment an agile form came bounding down a crag, and sprung between Ned's rifle and the Indians.

Both Guy and his companion uttered a cry of surprise.

They recognized Hawk-Eye!

There he stood, dressed as when Ned had last parted from him, in the garb of the white hunter.

"Hillo! What in thunder does this mean?" cried the latter. "I thought you war killed!"

"No," answered Hawk-Eye, a fierce expression settling on his face. "My people no kill—they do worse. They been whip me as if dog! They goin' to kill, but me get off. It is well! Hawk-Eye now live for revenge. His hand shall be set against those who were his brothers!"

"Don't know as I kin blame yer! So yer've jined these people?"

"Yes; they are Hawk-Eye's brothers, now. Let the others beware!"

"I glory in yer spunk, young boss!"

"You have been good friend to Hawk-Eye!—so has the white boy. The Mandans shall not harm you, if Hawk-Eye can help it."

Turning to the young chief, he then spoke to him of the kindness shown to him by the two pale-faces.

"Ugh! it is good! But Hawk-Eye was *ard* of Black Cloud's people *then*! He mus' remember that! We will have a talk!"

"Fust, for the Lord's sake, Hawk-Eye, *give* me back my rightful breeches!" cried Ned. "Yer kin see fur yerself that these *jeze* o'es of yourn are a mortil sight too short fur me, though I'll allow they're excellent, well made."

"It is well. We will make change."

His was soon done, and each was arrayed in his own proper garb.

"Thar, I feel as ef I'd shook all the Injun out o' me, now," said Ned. "With t'other breeches on, I felt somethin' like a bufler in a pig's skin, or a b'ar 'thout his tail!"

Hawk-Eye and the chief walked a short distance away, and held a long colloquy.

Presently they were joined by another person—an Indian girl of fifteen, fancifully arrayed, and quite pretty, in spite of her swarthy skin.

This the white soon learned was Singing Bird the sister of the chief.

Hawk-Eye went up to her and took her hand.

"Go back to our lodge," he said. "This is no place for the Singing-Bird! Remember her husband is now on the war-path."

Tears came to her eyes, but she bowed meekly and withdrew.

"Hillo, thar! Hawk-Eye!" called Ned. "What in thunder yer been up to? So yer've been gittin' hitched to that gal! Powers of airth! are it posserble yer could forgit Silver-Voice so soon?"

"Hawk-Eye has buried Silver-Voice in his heart!" replied the youth, sadly. "He can

think of her no more! She is lost to him. Singing-Bird has been good! When he stopped, weak from his wounds, and his people would have captured him, she helped him along to her people."

"Waal! waal! sech is nater!" remarked Ned, "though I could sartintly never content myself with another gal, arter losin' SUKE! By the Lord! whar on airth could yer find a critter that could sling a mop or kick up her heels in the double-shuffle like that bouncin' angel?"

Hawk-Eye and the chief continued their colloquy. At last they advanced—the former looking very sad.

"Hawk-Eye has done his best—he can do no more. The Black Cloud is chief, and must have his way. There has been a battle, and he has driven his enemies before him. The scalps of six of them wave on the war-pole before his lodge. He will not, for Hawk-Eye's sake, add the scalps of the white to the number, unless they refuse to go away. He would have the gold ravine to himself."

"Then, by the 'tarnall! it's war, fur I sw'ar I'll not leave these yere diggin's."

There was a wild whoop from the savages as tomahawks were lifted and rifles were pointed toward the two whites.

Ned and Guy aimed their pieces, and both were about to pull trigger in a bloody struggle, which must have resulted in their being cut to pieces, when the voice of Aiden was suddenly borne clearly and distinctly to the ears of all.

"No! no! No make the fire! Is it Hawk-Eye I see, standing by like an oak with arms lopped off, when his white friends are going to be the killed?"

The youth, who had been standing near with folded arms, now stepped between the Indians and the two whites.

"It is better," he said to Black Cloud, "to wait and hear what the Silver-Voice has to say!"

The stern eyes of the chief softened as his gaze rested on the lovely girl.

Among all the tribes in and about the mountains, the fame of her beauty had spread. Many a chief, hostile to her people, and among the rest Black Cloud himself, had made proposals for her hand, promising everlasting peace as a reward.

The warrior now held up his hand as a signal to his men to lower their tomahawks and rifles.

"Yes," he said, "we will listen to Silver-Voice."

"How comed yer heer?" inquired Ned, turning to the girl.

"Aiden had to go the run," she answered.

"Her people were coming. Glad, now. Hope save you and the brave boy!"

"I don't reckon yer kin do us any good."

She looked at Hawk-Eye.

"It is strange," she said. "My brother is alive. How is this? I saw the tomahawk fall on the head. I was far away, but I saw it, and I saw him fall."

"The one who struck Hawk-Eye was his own father," answered the youth. "He struck with the dull side of the tomahawk. Hawk-Eye's

brain was darkened, and he fell, but he was not killed."

He went on to explain his having joined his former enemies, and also how he had vainly tried to persuade Black Cloud to spare the whites.

"The chief must not harm them," said the girl to the Indian leader. "They are Aiden's friends, too."

"Silver-Voice has a tongue sweeter than that of the thrush," said Black Cloud. "The chief of the Mandans would like to hear it forever in his lodge!"

"No," answered Aiden. "There are girls of his own tribe. Better them the voice hear."

"There are none like Silver-Voice. Listen! If she will go with him to his lodge, her white friends shall not be harmed. Black Cloud will be their brothers and help them. Yes, he will show them the gold ravine, and they can have it all!"

At this Guy turned as pale as death. He gazed at Aiden, over whose lovely face a despairing sort of look had now fallen. His heart beat fast. He feared she might give the required consent to become Black Cloud's wife.

"No, Aiden!" he cried, impetuously. "How can you hesitate? Refuse! refuse!"

But the girl hung her head, and seemed to reflect.

"Speak!" cried Black Cloud. "Let the sweet voice come again, and say 'It is good!'"

"Silver-Voice!" shouted Ned, "don't yer mind him. He are all soft soap! Refuse the varmint and don't be afeared fur us! We kin settle them five Injuns, ef I know myself!"

Black Cloud uttered a shrill, harsh cry like that of a crow, when, all at once, nearly fifty armed savages appeared from behind lofty rocks, not ten yards off!

That Ned and the boy could make head against so many of their foes it were folly to imagine.

"Fire-Hair has eyes! What can he say now? We have him fast!" cried Black Cloud.

"By the 'tarnall!" ejaculated Ned, "even ef it are so, I'd sooner be cut to chowder than hev the gal be your'n!"

"Yes, Aiden," pleaded Guy. "I would sooner die a thousand deaths than have you consent!"

She gave him one swift, hopeless glance.

Then she said to the chief:

"Be it so; when Black Cloud is ready to take her to his lodge, Aiden will be ready to be taken! But, first she must see the two pale-faces free and safe!"

CHAPTER XV.

UNEXPECTED.

ON hearing this decision, Guy could not repress a cry of anguish.

"Cheer up, boy!" said Ned. "Thar's woman-kind fur you! Even SUKE sarved me a bad turn, but still yer must remember that *this* are done to save yer life!"

"Go!" cried Black Cloud exultingly, to the two whites. "The pale-faces are free to walk among us unharmed!"

"But how about the gold ravine? Yer promised to show us that!"

"The pale-faces are over it, now," was the reply, "under these rocks it lies! Look!"

As he spoke he pointed down through a crevice among the rugged masses. Looking that way, Ned was surprised to behold a deep ravine the sides of which were covered with quartz rocks of large and small size. In the dim light he could distinguish a small stream trickling along through this ravine.

"Thunder! who would o' believed it?" he cried. "I never thought to look down through any crevices hyar, not dreamin' thar war a hollow ravine under it! By what yer father said," he added, turning to Guy, "I reckined the ravine war in plain sight—open at the top!"

But, in the present state of his mind, Guy did not even hear him. His gaze was often turned toward Aiden, whom, of her own free will, he now saw walking away from the place with Black Cloud.

Fierce jealousy rose in his heart. The young chief was stately and handsome. The boy could not help feeling a conviction that she had, on seeing this Indian, been captivated by his personal appearance.

"She would pretend she did this to save my life!" he thought. "But I'll wager the beauty of the accursed fellow had something to do with her decision."

Even as this thought entered his mind, both he and Ned saw Aiden, who, with her companion, had now reached a thicket, which would screen the two from the gaze of the savages, who had been watching them, make a sudden, quick motion with her hand, as if for the whites to hurry away from the spot. The hunter and the boy had, by this time, moved about a hundred yards from their late foes, and Ned was about to lead the way down a pile of rocks, which would enable them to reach the end of the ravine and get into it.

"Blazes!" muttered Ned, "did yer see that, boy?"

"Yes," answered Guy bitterly, "she wants us to go off—to get as far as possible from her chosen husband!"

"Thar yer mistake! Hello!"

The exclamation was caused by Aiden's suddenly pulling the little silver-mounted pistol from her belt, and aiming it at her heart!

Sudden as the movement was, the chief saw it, and tried to prevent it. Ere he could turn it aside, the girl pulled the trigger. A mere chance saved her—only the cap snapped—the weapon hung fire.

"Thar, boy, thar! Now, what do yer say! She war willin' that Black Cloud should take her to his lodge, but, in her own mind, she war determined he should not take her thar alive! She hev proved herself a glorious gal—true to you as steel!"

"You are right, Ned! But see! the savage is now dragging her roughly along! His tomahawk is in one hand! We must save her! He is going to scalp her!"

But ere the boy had finished the sentence, Ned had raised old Sixty, and the sharp ring of the piece smote the air.

Black Cloud, loosening his grasp of the maiden, reeled and fell dead.

The next moment the hunter and his young

companion, far in advance of the savages, who, on hearing the report, were running to see what had happened, hurried toward the girl, who was coming to meet her.

As she was passing a hollow containing bushes, a tall savage of Black Cloud's tribe, who had probably been lurking there as a sort of lookout, darted forth, and, seizing the maiden in his arms, made off with her, soon disappearing with her among rocks and shrubbery.

"Arter them lively, boy, or the gal is lost!" cried Ned.

Guy needed no urging.

He kept up with the swift-limbed hunter, but the two saw nothing of those they were after.

Meanwhile the savages who were coming up behind them suspected by this time something of what had taken place, and their arrows and rifle-bullets rattled among the rocks about the two runners.

Their pursuers were close upon them; they could hear them on all sides, and it seemed evident that they would soon be captured.

All at once both fell into a narrow hollow they had not seen in the thick shrubbery and rolled to the bottom. As they descended a huge slab of rock, which had stood on end near the hollow, dropped over the opening, completely hiding them from sight.

Both, wondering at this timely occurrence, lay still, while the yelling savages went rushing past and over the slab.

Gradually the noise of their foes' footsteps receding in the distance was heard.

They then climbed up the side of the hollow, and were about to raise the slab when it was lifted by another person, whom, in the gathering twilight they recognized as Hawk-Eye.

"It is well," said the latter; "again has Hawk-Eye helped his white friends. They had better go far from here. The lodges of the Mandans are not more than twice an arrow's dart in front of them."

"It war you then who put the slab over us, when we fell in heer?" said Ned.

"It is true."

"And where is Aiden?" inquired Guy, eagerly. "Can you tell us?"

"Silver-Voice will soon be heard no more. She is in one of the lodges, and fifty of the Mandans guard her. She deceived Black Cloud and she will die."

"I kin believe yer," said Ned, sadly.

"Can you not save her or tell us how to do?" inquired Guy.

"No. The guard have keen eyes and quick ears. The doom of Silver-Voice is sealed!"

He moved away as he spoke, soon disappearing from their sight.

The gaze of the hunter was now turned away far to the northeast, where for some moments he had been watching faint gleams of light flaring up against the sky.

"Do yer see 'em, boy?"

"What? those gleams? They are the northern lights, I suppose."

"No—no! They are from the fires of a large party o' white hunters."

"How do you know they are whites?"

"By the high gleams. An Injun, specially

when the tribes are on the war-path, don't show so much fire."

"You think we can get the hunters to help us? Come on then, Ned; come on, quick!"

"Not too fast, boy. Fu'st we must hev a look at the camp of the Mandans, and see ef things are 'zactly as Hawk-Eye said."

He climbed a rugged hight, on the brow of which some firs and redwood hid the two from the gaze of any prying Indian who might look up from the camp, which was in sight from this point.

In the dim light the spectators could make out the lodge in which Aiden was kept by the numerous guard around it, showing that her rescue by them was at present impossible.

At dawn she would probably be led forth to execution, and now Ned deliberated whether he should wait and see if some chance would not offer for a dash to save her, or whether it were best to try to make his way to the hunters, whose fires he saw, and endeavor to bring them up in time to assist him. Finally he decided upon the latter course. The two made good speed, but so rugged and difficult was the way, that the hunter at length paused, doubtful if he would get help in season to effect his purpose.

The locality abounded in wolves, whose dismal howlings the two could hear all about them. Now and then they could distinguish the dim forms of whole troops of these fierce monsters running out upon lofty crags, or climbing the sides of precipices.

Suddenly, looking behind him, Ned uttered an exclamation.

"Heavens and airth! thar she is!"

Guy then perceived a short distance off, on the summit of a lofty hight, the form of a woman whom several savages were lashing to a rock. The light of a torch carried by one of these persons, plainly revealed the figure of the female, which could easily be recognized as that of Aiden.

"We will save her!" cried the boy, impetuously. "Come, Ned, come, before it is too late. I suppose they are going to burn her alive!"

"I reckin not," answered Ned. "I hev some idee of what they mean to do, but I'm not shore!"

The two moved as swiftly as possible toward the hight.

The savages had now put out their torch, so that the form of the girl could no longer be seen.

Ned and Guy had nearly reached the precipice when, through the gloom, they beheld a number of dusky figures ascending the elevation. A prolonged, dismal howling indicated that these were wolves.

There was a whole pack of the monsters, their dim forms extending in a long line as they moved up the elevation.

"Thar you are! It are plain enough now! Silver-Voice hev been left lashed to the rock, to be eaten by wolves!"

"Quick, then, for God's sake!" cried Guy. "I am afraid we'll be too late!"

Hurrying on, the twain were soon climbing

the hight in the rear of the monsters. They took a direction which would carry them past the pack. Thus getting ahead of them, just as they arrived within about twenty yards of the bound girl, they commenced to fire at them as fast as possible. The fierce animals snapped and showed their white teeth, in their rage, and many of them strove to reach their assailants. But the latter stood upon an elevated boulder, and, as fast as the animals tried to climb it, they were beaten back. That the Indians were not far off was indicated by an arrow whizzing, now and then, about the heads of the hunter and the boy. The wolves kept the savages from reaching them, for it was evident, they were between them and the whites. Guy went to Aiden, and cut her loose from the rock. The wolves had now retreated half-way down the front of the precipice, and there was no time to lose in conveying her from the hight, as numbers of the Indians now were approaching.

The three descended the elevation on the back side.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE GOLD HUNTERS.

OVERJOYED at having rescued Silver-Voice—at having her again with him—Guy hurried on with her at his side. Ned keeping a little in the rear, to cover the retreat.

"You are a noble girl, Aiden," said the boy. "How fortunate the pistol you aimed at your breast, when you were with Red Cloud, did not go off!"

"As things happen it make good! Silver-Voice would cheerfully have die to save her friend. You think she been really going with him—leave you for him!" added the girl, reproachfully.

"You cannot blame me, as it looked so. Even Ned, who has had some experience with women, thought the same."

"Fire-Hair think so?" said Aiden, much astonished. "Fire-Hair all time make the compare with his Suke!" she added, laughing.

The route now taken by the fugitives led them in the direction of the gold ravine.

They had reason to believe that the savages were all around them.

Ned, therefore, finally selected a hollow in a steep rock, opening upon a platform about fifty feet above the ground, and which could only be reached in front.

From her wallet, which had not been taken away from her, the girl furnished a meal for the trio.

Then Guy and the hunter spread their blankets for her in the hollow that she might obtain sleep. Each of her two protectors also managed to get a little rest on the bare rock, during the night, as they took turns on guard.

At dawn they were attacked by nearly a hundred savages. These, suddenly breaking forth from the shrubbery, advanced to the assault, their arrows and shots whistling about the two whites, who, however, were partly sheltered by a ledge on the rocky platform.

Loading and firing, the hunter and the boy kept their enemies at bay for several hours, as only three at a time could ascend the front of

the rock. But they soon after perceived that they were getting short of ammunition, and knew they could not hold out much longer.

At that critical moment the roar of a volley of rifles was heard on the left, and about fifty stalwart white men, well armed, made a dash toward the Indians. Guy and Ned joined them, and their foes were driven off, after a brief combat.

The new-comers were composed of a mixture of French and Americans. Their leader—a middle-aged person—was French, a fine-looking man, who spoke good English.

"Happy to have had the satisfaction of rescuing you," he said to Ned, when the combat was finished.

"Thank you," said Ned. "The niggers would sartintly hev lifted our ha'r but fur you."

"Yes, they would have done it. We are from near Sacramento, on a gold hunt; that's how we came here in such good time. We got impatient, and set out at midnight from our last encampment, several miles to the north of here."

"Yes, it war, then, your lights I saw last night," said Ned. "You say you're on a gold hunt; couldn't yer find any gold t'other side o' the mountains?"

"A little, but it is not now there as it was ten years ago, when I visited the place. I then stayed there three years, and obtained a good supply of gold dust, but I lost what gold could never pay for," he added, mournfully. "I lost a child."

"Yer don't say so!"

"Yes, a little girl—four years old."

"War she killed, or did she stray away?"

"I could never tell. The skeleton of a child was found near the mountains, and I always had a suspicion it was hers; but I could not be certain, as it was in a condition which prevented its being identified. Of course I scoured the country far and near, but I could never find my little girl, and I really fear the skeleton was hers—that she had been attacked and devoured by coyotes or wolves. My wife took brain fever and died soon after, and I left the place not to visit it again until a week ago. A wandering Indian from the mountains came and informed me that there was plenty of gold among the Sierras."

"The varmint war mistook—leastwise it is not *everywhar*."

He exchanged glances with Guy as he spoke.

"You would advise me to give up the search, then?"

Even as he spoke, one of his party, who had been absent awhile, returned and showed to the leader a small lump of rich ore. Monsieur Joubert—such was his name—was much excited over the discovery.

"Yer ll please to tell me whar yer got that gold?" said Ned.

"Are you, too, in search of gold?" said Joubert.

"We sartintly are, and we've 'bout found a place we've been long lookin' fur. I reckon that lump war taken from thar. Ef so, yer kin hev that, but no more!"

Quick, angry glances were turned toward Ned by the party.

"Whar's it your bizness?" cried a tall Mississippian, thumping the butt of his piece. "I reckon we hev as good a right to the gold as you."

"No, fur this boy's father diskivered it first. He has the map with him. Show 'em the map, Guy."

Guy unrolled the map. The French leader scrutinized it closely.

"I don't deny what you say," he remarked, "but I doubt if merely a prior discovery gives the right of possession, as the land did not *belong* to the discoverer. Had you *settled* on it, however, you could have claimed it, according to the miner's rule!"

"I differ from yer," said Ned. "It's as good ours as ef we war already workin' it."

The Frenchman shook his head.

"Under the circumstances," he said, blandly, "I agree to give you a sixth of all we obtain."

"No yer don't," said Ned, decisively. "Not a single lump of the gold—previded it hev been taken from the place I'm a-speakin' about, will I give up, arter this. The claim belongs to us!"

"Before we dispute further about it, let us go and see *wher* my man found his lump," said Joubert.

Accompanied by Ned and Guy, and followed by Aiden, who kept a little in the rear, the Frenchman, guided by the person who had obtained the specimen of gold, soon reached the place whence the lump had been taken.

As Ned had thought was the case, it proved to be the ravine of which he and his young friend had so long been in search.

This ravine was about a hundred feet in length, and had something the appearance of a cave, as a huge rock hung from above over the end, leaving only about nine feet between it and the ground for an entrance. From this entrance the ground had a deep slope to the bottom of the ravine, and there was no way of egress at the other extremity. As already stated, a stream ran through the place. The banks of this stream were of reddish clay, and the sands under the water fairly glittered with particles of the precious metal. The rocks on the side of the hollow were of rough white-veined quartz, and it only needed a glance to show that there was gold in the crevices. From one of these crevices Joubert's man had extracted the lump with his knife.

"Yes, this are the place," said Ned. "This are our gold ravine, which we diskivered a few days ago, but hadn't a chance to explore on account of the Injuns."

Joubert's eyes sparkled as he glanced around him.

"You must remember," he said, "that my man was the first to visit the place, and take gold from it. I think I have a just claim to the ravine."

Ned's eyes glared like a tiger's.

"No, by the livin' catamount! I tell yer I won't give it up!" roared the hunter. "It be-

longs to the boy hyar, and I'm goin' to stan' up fur our rights!"

The man with Joubert pulled out his knife to extract some more gold. Ned collared him and hurled him away.

"Git out, yer varmint!" he cried. "Leave the place, both on yer!" he added, cocking his rifle.

Joubert made a sign to his man, and walked away, followed by that person. But there was an expression in his eyes which showed that he had no notion of giving up the place.

"This bad," said Aiden, "too bad have trouble. He got plenty man—he make drive you away."

"No, he won't," said Ned. "I'll defend this claim to the last, and you'll help me, boy?" he added, turning inquiringly to Guy.

"I think we are entitled to the place," answered the lad, "as my father was the first discoverer. I will stand by you."

"Come, then. We kin put up a breastwork to keep them thievin' raskils out, seein' as [the ravine kin only be entered on one side."

There were numbers of rocky fragments, large and small, in the ravine. Ned and the boy commenced to pile them up, and they had soon formed a breastwork five feet high across the narrow entrance of the hollow. The rocks of the obstruction were mostly quartz, and it was evident that some of them contained gold, so that this little defensive work might be truthfully termed a GOLD BARRICADE.

CHAPTER XVII

THE WARNING.

HOURS passed, but there was as yet no sign of the Frenchman and his party.

"Perhaps Joubert has thought the matter over, and has concluded that you were right," remarked Guy. "Otherwise I should say he would have come here before this."

Scarcely had he spoken when Joubert and his men were seen advancing.

The Frenchman halted his people within a few yards of the barricade.

"My friend," he said to Ned. "I am sorry that you oppose my claim, which, I am sure, is a just one. As the case stands, you are but two, one a mere boy, while I have a party of fifty armed men. Besides that, you are short of ammunition. Please to use a little reason, and see how easily we could overpower you if we wished."

"Go ahead, ef yer want to," replied Ned. "All I hev to say is, that yer'll hev to walk over the dead bodies of me and the boy 'fore yer git in hyar!"

"I would greatly regret using force, at all," answered Joubert. "You had better quietly go with me to San Francisco, and there we'll put the affair in the hands of lawyers, and abide by the decision which—"

"No, by the 'tarnal!" roared Ned. "Lawyer are another name for liar, and yer'll never catch this child hevin' anythin' to do with them coons!"

"But as I do not want to have blood shed, in other words as I do not want to kill you and the boy, I see no other way. Can you suggest any?"

"I reckon I kin!"

"Well, what is it?"

"Raise yer camp, and leg it out o' these diggin's!"

"I certainly shall not give up my rights."

"Then yer must take the consequences!"

Joubert walked to and fro for some moments—puzzled to know how he should act. Meanwhile the rough hunters of his party—some of whom were not at all troubled with his delicate scruples against taking human life, suggested to him that "it mout be as well to commence work; that ef nothin' war done, how could he ever hope to git his rights?"

At last Joubert said to Ned:

"I will leave you here until to-morrow, hoping that by that time, you will have reflected on the subject, and will see it in a different light." So saying he withdrew, and was soon out of sight.

When night came Ned resolved to keep a good lookout, thinking that Joubert might otherwise resort to some stratagem—such as that of making him and Guy prisoners. Aiden and the boy sat on a rocky platform, conversing for hours.

"That French greedy, but he seem not the bad man," remarked the girl. "I not can tell the why, but I like him!"

"Look out, or you will make me jealous."

"He has too much the age," laughed Aiden.

"It is the voice I like. It seem to me, sometime, I been hear that voice before."

"Perhaps, when he gives the order to shoot us, you will not like his voice so well," said Guy.

"He never give that order. He has not the bad enough."

"We shall see."

Not long after, the girl lay fast asleep in an alcove of the ravine side, on her usual couch of blankets, while the boy also slumbered—not far from the barricade, where Ned, leaning on old Sixty, grimly kept watch.

All at once the hunter leaned forward, peering through the obscurity. Some one was stealthily approaching.

"Who comes thar?" cried Ned, pointing his piece toward the dim form.

"Hawk-Eye!" was the reply.

"Come along, then, and let's hear what yer've got to say."

"Hawk-Eye comes to warn you," he said.

"The pale face better go away from here."

"No, yer don't! No sech trickery can go down with this coon! Who sent yer, Hawk-Eye? It war Joubert—I kin almost sw'ar!"

The youth drew himself up with dignity.

"What has Hawk-Eye ever done that you should make him like a snake? Has he ever deceived his friends?"

The boy spoke sadly, and Ned felt convinced of his sincerity.

"Thar, Hawk Eye, I own I war mistook!" he said. "Go on, and tell me what yer comed heer fur—why you warn me to leave this place."

"The Mandans are going to let the water down into the ravine to-night! The waters are many, and will fill the hollows and drive you out. The Mandans know you are here. I have said it! Now I go!"

Without another word, Hawk Eye glided off, which he had scarcely done, when Ned heard the blows the Indians were dealing with their hatchets and other implements against the rocky wall above, which, as already stated, was the only barrier that kept the stream there from pouring down into the hollow.

Should the hollow thus become filled with water, there would still be a way for the occupants to escape, as they could leave it by the entrance to the ravine, but much toil and trouble would be required after to let the water out of the hollow, as well as to keep it from constantly pouring in from the stream above.

"I must try to surmount the raskils!" muttered Ned. "I'll clomb up near to whar they are and try the effect of old Sixty. They'll think, ef I kin fix it so, that the hull gang o' Joubert's party are goin' to tackle 'em!"

Before carrying out his intention, he left the ravine, and ascended a rock which would afford him a view of the thicket ahead, faintly lighted by the new moon.

Seeing no signs of Joubert's party, he felt convinced that it would be safe to leave the barricade long enough to accomplish the plan he had formed.

He returned to the ravine, and with some difficulty scaling one of its sides, he was soon close to the crevice nearest the rocky wall at which the Indians were pounding. It had taken him about half an hour to reach this position, and he realized that there was no time to lose. Enconcing himself on a ledge, he pointed his piece toward the dark forms of the savages and fired.

"This way, men!" he shouted. "Heer's the varmints! Give it to 'em!"

But the Indians kept steadily on at their work, as if well aware of the stratagem he had resorted to.

"Drat the cussed niggers!" he muttered. "It are hard to deceive an Injun!"

"Halloa! there, Ned—was it you who fired? Where are you, and what is the matter?" came the voice of Guy from below.

"It's nothin', boy! I'll tell yer when I git down ag'in!" answered Ned.

It was harder work to descend than it had been to mount, but the hunter safely reached the bottom of the ravine at last.

He then explained to the boy his futile attempt to drive away the savages.

"How dark it is here," remarked the lad.

"Thunder! yes!" answered Ned, directing a quick glance toward the barricade.

Then he uttered an exclamation of surprise.

"What's been goin' on while I've been up thar?" he inquired.

"Nothing, as far as I know," replied Guy.

"It must 'a' been done while I war climbin'," said the hunter, as he hurried toward the breastwork. "Yes, I thought so," he added, when he reached the barricade. "Heer we are—*shut up in this hole*, so that thar's no way fur us to git out!"

"What do you mean?" inquired Guy.

"Come and see fur yerself!"

Guy coming up, then made a startling discovery.

The narrow entrance of the ravine was now

completely blocked up with masses of rock, too large and heavy for less than a dozen men, at least, to move away! Thus penned up in the ravine, the three persons there would be drowned by the waters of the stream when they should pour into the hollow!

CHAPTER XVIII.

CONCLUSION.

"Who could have done this?" said Guy.

"It war either Joubert and his men, or them cussed Injuns! I reckon it war the niggers?"

"Yes, Indian must have done it," said Aiden, who, having been awakened by the late noise, had also come up. "Joubert not bad enough to do so."

"Yer've better 'pinion of him than I hev," said Ned, "though, in this case, I don't think he are the one that's done the bizness."

Scarcely had the hunter spoken when a splashing, rushing noise was heard above, and the next moment the waters of the stream came pouring down into the hollow!

"We drown!" cried Aiden, in alarm. "What shall we make do?"

"Yes, gal, we'll be drowned heer like rats. I kin see no help fur it. Light the torch, boy, and let's look if thar's anything to be done."

Guy lighted a pine knot which the hunter had brought into the ravine, and the gleam flashed upon the descending sheet of water.

The golden sands under the stream and the metallic quartz on the sides of the ravine danced and sparkled in the lurid rays, as if to mock the three with the view of what they were destined never to obtain.

"The water comes fast!" said Ned. "It won't be long 'fore it'll fill the hollow. Thar's only one thing to do, which are to clomb up the side o' the ravine, so as to 'scape the flood as long as we kin!"

The hunter went first, and ascending nearly to the top of the inclosure, fixed the torch in a crevice.

"Hyar's a ledge," he said. "You and I'll help the gal up hyar."

But Aiden, smiling at this proffer of assistance, commenced to scale the rocks with the lightness and agility of a chamois.

She and Guy finally gained the ledge. There the three stood watching the ascending waters, Guy now and then discharging his rifle in the hope that the report might be heard by some of Joubert's people and bring them to the rescue.

"Yer mout as well save yer powder," remarked Ned. "They are too far off to heer you."

Owing to the narrowness of the ravine, the flood ascended rapidly, and the entrance was so closely blocked up that the little water escaping through the crevices was not in quantity a tenth of what kept incessantly pouring in from above.

Soon it had risen to within ten feet of the ledge.

"We are bound to go under!" said Ned. "How little we kin ever tell what our fate are to be! Had any one told me that at some futur' time I was to be killed, and my ba'r to be raised, I mout 'a' thought it a perfectly nateral death, but I'll allow that I never reckined to be drowned like a trapped muskrat!"

Higher and higher rose the water.

Finally it overflowed the ledge—a few minutes later it was up to the knees of the three, almost carrying them off their feet.

Aiden stood close to Guy, who, with his arm about her waist, held her firmly.

"We die together!" said the girl.

"Don't give up all hope yet," said the boy. "Even after we are carried off the ledge, we will have room, for a while, to swim!"

The water rising higher, the trio could with difficulty support themselves on the rugged platform.

In another minute they would be swept off, and they were prepared for swimming, when all at once there was a roar like thunder as one of the rocks blocking the entrance was pulled away, and the water rushed through the opening with tremendous force.

"Saved!" cried Guy.

"Yes, boy, we sartintly are!" cried Ned, as the gleam of torches flashed athwart the entrance, and voices were there heard.

The water now continuing to pour through the opening faster than it came in, finally left room for the three to descend low enough so as to creep along to the entrance. There the stream being swollen to a torrent, assistance was necessary to enable them to get upon dry land.

As they had supposed was the case, Joubert and his men were there, and it was these people who had contrived to dislodge the rock over the entrance so as to let out the water.

"You heard my rifle, then?" said Guy to Joubert.

"No; we heard nothing. It was that young Indian, Hawk-Eye, who came and informed us of your peril."

"Where is he now?" inquired Aiden. "I not see him."

Joubert looked earnestly at the speaker, to whom he had been attracted, in a singular manner, from the moment he saw her.

"I do not know," he said. "The youth went away as soon as we had removed the rock."

"We sartintly hev to thank you fur savin' our lives," said Ned. "Some raskils in your sarcumstances would hev only been too glad to hev us drowned, so that thar'd 'a' been no more trouble 'bout the gold claim."

"As it happens, I am not a *rascal*," replied Joubert. "All I want is what justly belongs to me."

"Probable by this time you've changed yer mind 'bout the ravine and will allow that we are the rightful owners."

"No, sir," replied Joubert, firmly. "It belongs to us!"

"No it don't, and yer'll never git it while we're livin'!" cried Ned, angrily.

"I *will* have it!" replied Joubert, who also was fast losing temper, "for I repeat it is mine!"

"You're a 'farnal liar!" roared Ned, at the same time cocking his piece.

Joubert pulled a pistol from his belt and the two men took aim at each other.

Guy also cocked his rifle and, as knives and pistols were drawn by several of the party, a

bloody tragedy must have resulted but for the sudden intervention of another person.

This was the Indian youth, Hawk-Eye, who now came bounding from behind a rock, and threw himself between Ned and Joubert.

"No fire!" he cried. "Trouble make, when pale-faces should be friends!"

"We kin never be friends!" cried Ned, "while this chap persists in cheatin' the boy hyar out of his rights. His father was the first to discover the mine; so it belongs to his son!"

"Hawk-Eye listen! Hawk-Eye hear all," replied the young Indian. "This is not first time he hear name of Joubert!"

"What do you mean?" inquired the Frenchman. "I never heard *your* name before I came here."

"Hawk-Eye hear *yours*. You not want to take gold ravine from white boy!"

"I see no reason why I should not have what belongs to me."

"There *is* reason. Listen and you shall hear what it is. The time has come for me to disobey my father—the chief. He told Hawk-Eye never to tell the secret, but Hawk-Eye must speak. Now listen. Years ago you lose little child!"

"I did," answered Joubert, with much emotion.

"I tell how lose. Hawk-Eye's father, with others of the tribe, often came from the mountains to attack the whites. One day Hawk-Eye was with his father, near Sacramento, when they saw a little girl not more than four years old, picking flowers. All at once she stood still and gave a frightened cry, for she sees skeleton of another child, which Indian been kill and scalp a year before—child of Mexican. Hawk-Eye's father now rush at little girl with tomahawk to scalp, but Hawk-Eye like girl's looks—she so pretty—and he get between girl and tomahawk, and beg father not to kill. Long time father try to get him away from child so he kill, but Hawk-Eye cling to child and keep say he must *not* kill. At last he say not if Hawk-Eye never tell, and so Hawk-Eye promise *not* tell. He take child far away with him among mountains, and bring up as daughter. By and by, when again we go near Sacramento, we learn child's name Joubert, and Joubert look for her, half-crazy all time. Once we *see* Joubert, when he not know it, and that is why Hawk-Eye know Joubert *now*. As white child grow up among us, she seem to know she not Indian, and she often ask how she come there. Then Red-Knife, Hawk-Eye's father, tell lie. He say white woman die and leave girl to his care. And so he tell missionary, who come once and stay with us among mountains for a year. Missionary good pale-face. He teach white girl plenty to read and write—he teach Hawk-Eye some, too. That's why he speak English better than many Indian!"

"But the child—*my* Adrienne—where is she now?"

"*SHE IS HERE!*" replied Hawk-Eye, looking toward Silver-Voice. "She been say her name *Adrienne*, but we call *Aiden!*"

For a moment Joubert stood like one transfixed, staring at the beautiful girl before him.

It was plain now—the mutual liking each had felt for the other, from the first!

As if to convince Joubert there was no mistake, Hawk-Eye pulled out, by its slender gold chain a little miniature of her mother, which the girl always wore next to her heart, under her doeskin robe.

"See! The pale-face should know that!" cried the youth.

Joubert gave one keen glance at the well-known portrait; the next moment he had clasped his child in his arms.

"Adrienne—my long lost girl! Not dead, after all!"

The spectators of this scene were so deeply affected by it, that, for a time, all thought of the gold ravine was banished.

Hawk-Eye was the first to revert to it.

"Joubert find daughter. White boy here, going to make wife. That's how gold ravine will belong to both! Joubert not would take gold ravine from his own daughter!"

"Tell me, Adrienne, do you love this boy?" said Joubert. "Is it so? Have you consented to be his wife?"

"I have," she answered, in a low voice, directing a swift, tender glance toward Guy.

"Then Hawk-Eye is right; there need be no further trouble about the gold ravine!"

"Waal, now, by the 'tarnal Cupid!" cried Ned. "Ef this aren't the most unexpected and fortun'it sarcumstance as could turn up! I'm mouty glad, both fur the gal's and the boy's sake, and though everything of this yere sort brings to my mind the bitter yarb of disapp'intment with respecks to that angel, SUKE, drat me ef I fur one don't put in some tall dancin' at the weddin'."

The whole party went back to Sacramento, and the proper machines having been obtained there, Guy and Joubert, with a large force of men, went back to the gold ravine, which, in process of time, was thoroughly drained and worked.

It yielded tremendous profits, so that by the time Guy was eighteen, he found himself in possession of millions.

He then married Aiden, or rather *Adrienne*, as she should now be called, and Fiery Ned kept his promise with regard to his dancing at the wedding. His tall, agile form, clad in a brand-new bunter costume, was conspicuous among the guests, tripping, not the *light* but the *heavy* "fantastic toe," with none other than his long-lost love—SUKE, who, on his informing her how he had made her a widow, was so grateful for his having avenged her husband's desertion of her, that she consented to become his wife!

THE END.

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